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A new chapter 6 (Transportation and Circulation) was adopted on April 5, 1993, replacing the previous Chapter 6 contained therein. See separate document (attached).



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CITY OF MERCED

GENERAL PLAN

Revised November 1987

Adopted:

Merced City Council June 15, 1981

Approved:

Merced City Planning Commission March 25, 1981

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chapter one



INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Basic Assumptions

Goals

Format and Organization

The Land Use Concept

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The General Plan is a comprehensive set of policies and recommended action programs concerning the physical development and environmental management of the Merced planning area (see Figure 1-A). It relies heavily on the reactions and comments expressed by the Citizens Advisory Committee, the City Council and Planning Commission as well as other public agencies and citizens. Although most of the elements contained in this portion of the General Plan are mandated by California law, the thrust of this document, more than fulfilling legal mandates, is the provision of new directions toward a more responsive and meaningful planning process within the community. The document is therefore intended as an active reference tool, one for consideration in reaching decisions in all aspects of the community's physical improvement.

The policies and recommendations in the General Plan are directed toward facilitating the rebuilding of transitional areas and promoting the City's orderly physical growth. While the Plan is adopted and implemented within an official context, its value as an educational document and as a commitment to future actions should be of equal significance. The overall intent of the General Plan is to provide guidance, coordination and continuity to the long-range physical character and development of the City.

In this sense, however, the Plan is not as a fixed set of guidelines incapable of being changed to meet important community needs as they occur. As will be spelled out in Chapter 9 on implementing the General Plan, this potential limitation is recognized and a process is provided for periodic review and revision as necessary. Caution should be exercised in these future revisions, though, to see that specific changes do not adversely affect related segments within the total comprehensive plan.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

The General Plan is based on the primary assumption that the quality of life in the community can be improved by the participation of citizens and public officials in a concerted planning effort.

A second major assumption is that the City will continue to pursue a policy of accommodating growth which is compatible with adopted social, economic and environmental objectives and standards. The emphasis will be placed on managing and guiding growth.

The third major assumption used in this Plan is the incorporation of many existing policies and plans which are already being implemented and followed in the City.

MERCED COUNTY SPECIFIC URBAN DEVELOPMENT PLAN

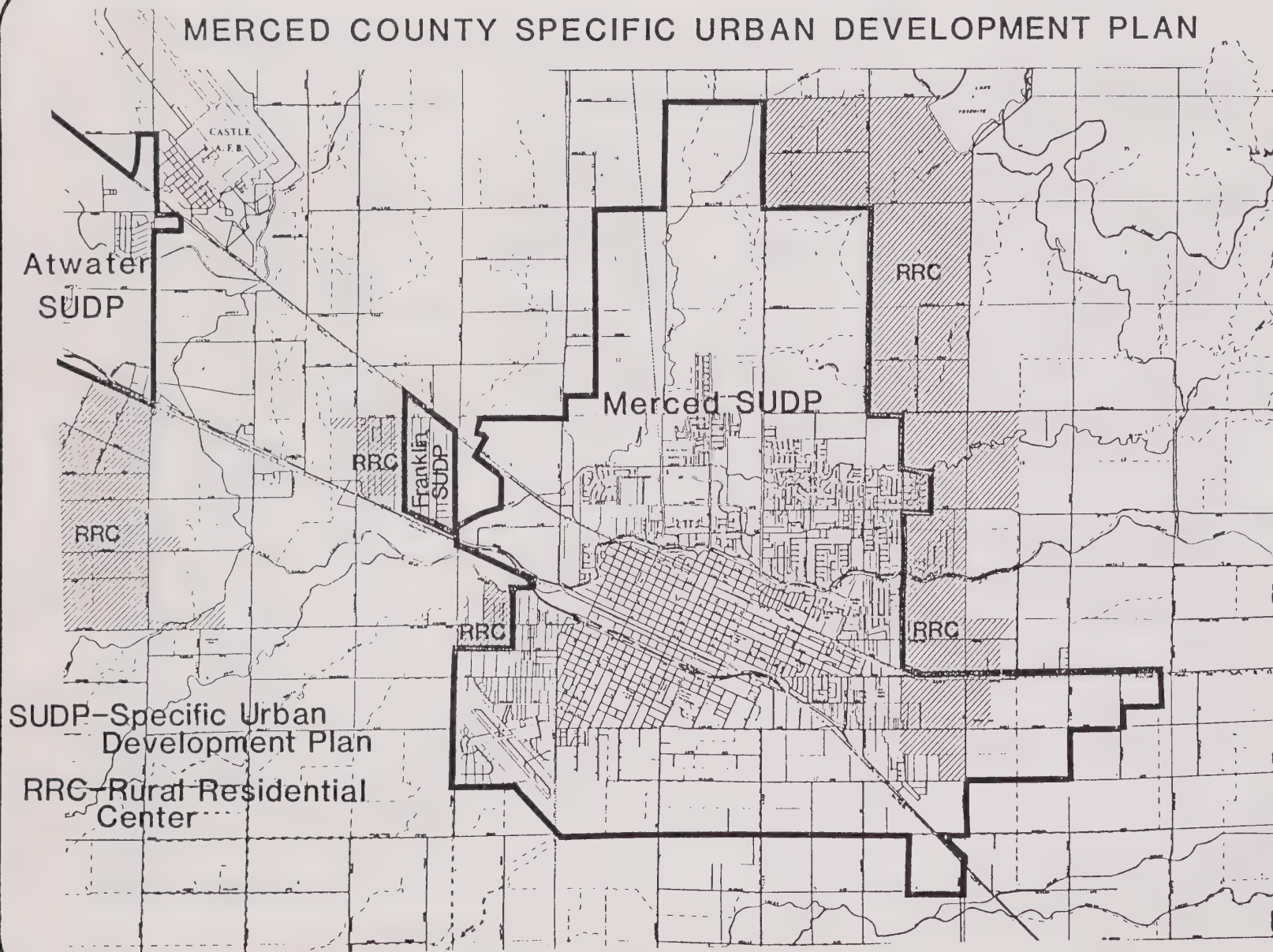


Figure 1-A

A final and very important assumption is that the City and County will continue existing procedures and find new ways to ensure that the City and County are working toward common goals in guiding the future development of the Merced area. Because both entities exercise substantial influence over development, individual actions taken must be consistent with a common set of purposes. It will simply not be possible for many of the ideas contained in this Plan to become reality unless the City and County can continue to unify their views regarding Merced's future.

GOALS

General goals are starting points for planning physical development programs in the Merced Planning Area. They are broad statements of desire and, as such, give direction to those responsible for planning and programming the City's development. In this process, the goals function as criteria against which alternative courses of action are evaluated.

The City's future growth is affected by external as well as internal forces. A healthy, attractive environment now and for future generations will require considerable effort, and sometimes sacrifice, to direct programs and policies for implementation which address themselves to both the existing urban resources and the growth impacts normally associated with expansion. The City's overriding goal, therefore, is:

1. Improve and conserve existing urban development and, at the same time, encourage and promote quality growth in expanding areas of the City and the local economy.

Additional general goals for the physical development of the City are stated below:

2. Promote the distinctive character and identity of the City.
3. Provide safe and adequate housing for all citizens and provide each with an opportunity for choice between alternative living environments.
4. Create a safe, efficient, coordinated and balanced system of transportation facilities capable of serving the needs of all citizens.
5. Develop a strong, diversified economic base and provide for the orderly distribution of employment and other economic opportunities.
6. Provide opportunities for a full range of recreational activities to meet the demands of an expanding population.
7. Provide all residents with opportunities for a wide range of cultural, social, educational, health, and commercial activities and facilities.

8. Protect and manage the diverse and valuable natural land, water, and air resources for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.
9. Conserve and protect the City's older residential neighborhoods.
10. Protect and promote viable, pleasant, and safe residential and commercial neighborhoods.
11. Give a strong emphasis to the preservation of historically and architecturally significant structures in the community.
12. Guide urban growth to obtain an urban form as compact as possible by encouraging the orderly expansion of urban utilities and facilities, and preserving designated agricultural lands from urbanization.
13. Promote physical development in the City which achieves a high level of efficiency and places a high priority on enhancement of the existing urban area, in-fill development, and energy conservation.
14. Place a strong emphasis on the design and appearance of all development within the community.

FORMAT AND ORGANIZATION

State law specifies that the General Plan must address certain local issues and shall consist of "a statement of development policies and shall include a diagram or diagrams (e.g., land use map) and text setting forth objectives, principles, standards, and plan proposals." In order to address the community's planning issues, the state further mandates that a city or county general plan must consist of the following elements:

1. Land Use
2. Circulation
3. Housing
4. Conservation
5. Open Space
6. Seismic Safety/Safety
7. Noise

Because many of these elements are very closely interrelated and the importance of major issues varies so widely between jurisdictions, state law specifies the basic contents of the general plan but, for the most part, it leaves the format to local discretion.

For the purposes of this general plan, a partial consolidation of the required elements has been selected. The combining of some of the elements was based on a desire to keep the general plan as simple as possible so that it becomes an easily used and referenced document. The Noise Element and Seismic Safety/Safety Elements are be contained in separate documents.

<u>This Part of General Plan</u>	<u>Separate Documents</u>
Land Use	
Circulation	Seismic Safety/Safety
Housing	
Open Space	Noise
Conservation	

In addition to the state mandated elements, most cities and counties add optional elements to this basic set. These are often necessary to adequately address what the community feels are important planning issues. Optional elements adopted by a city or county have the same force and effect as the required ones. As stated in the General Plan Guidelines, published by the State Office of Planning and Research, "...the adoption of any optional element expands the regulatory authority of the city or county through the requirements that zoning and subdivisions be consistent with the General Plan. The factual data and policy adopted in optional elements can also be used as the legal foundation for other forms of regulation...". (State of California, General Plan Guidelines, Review Draft, Pg. 5-6).

Optional elements incorporated into this part of the General Plan are listed below along with the chapter where they can be found:

<u>Optional Element</u>	<u>Chapter</u>
Scenic Highways	3
Recreation	3 and 4
Historic Preservation	4, 5, and 8
Economic Development	5
Redevelopment	5
Transportation	6
Transit	6
Bikeways, Trails & Paths	6
Public Services & Facilities	7
Community Design	8

There are two additional portions of the General Plan not previously mentioned which are essential in making this Plan a meaningful planning tool. One is Chapter 9 which discusses the implementation and ongoing review of the General Plan. This includes a summary of the action programs which must be followed through in order to implement this Plan. Secondly, the final segment of the Plan contains the Appendices which make up the factual data and trend analysis. This information represents the most current information available. To keep the General Plan viable, these Appendices must be kept up-to-date in order to support both maintenance and/or revision of the General Plan in the future.

THE LAND USE CONCEPT

The other key organizational factor used in the format of the General Plan concerns the Land Use Element. The Land Use Element is the most visible portion of many general plans and often overshadows the importance of relating land use to all the other issues and policies which make up the general plan. Because the Land Use Element is so inter-related with all the other elements of the General Plan, to create a separate Land Use Element would only cause unnecessary repetition and detract from the importance of the land use concepts and policies which are integrated into the other elements. As a result, there is no separate chapter or element of the General Plan which can be specifically labeled as the Land Use Element. Land use policies and recommendations will be found throughout the text as they pertain to the issues which are grouped as follows:

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Issue</u>
2	Urban Expansion
3	Natural Resources, Open Space and Conservation
4	Residential Environment
5	Economic Environment
6	Transportation and Circulation
7	Public Facilities
8	Urban Design

Because there is no separate Land Use Element, some background information on the land use concepts used in the General Plan may also be helpful. For example, a basic premise of the land use proposals is that the supply of land allocated for urban land uses during a 20-year time period should be adequately above that which will actually be developed, yet should not exceed the city's genuine need. The primary objective is to avoid a scattered pattern of development and the accompanying excessive costs of public utilities and services (i.e., water supply, sewage, refuse collection, streets, fire and police protection, parks and recreation, school busing, etc.); the premium cost for private utilities (electricity, gas, telephone); and, displacement of land suitable for agricultural production.

The land use proposals also recognize the Merced County General Plan and the County's system of Specific Urban Development Plans (SUDP) and Rural Residential Centers (RRC) as is shown in Figure 1-A. For the most part, the City's proposals are consistent with the County General Plan. The land use designations are intended to represent the City's policies on urbanization and open space preservation. No urban development or extension of city services should be permitted beyond the boundaries of lands designated for urban uses. The resulting compaction of urban development not only will avoid scattered and costly development, but will lessen energy usage.

Another primary land use concept is that urbanization may be prohibited or restricted to specific land uses in areas subject to severe environmental constraints. Based on the premise that agricultural lands are important to the area's economy as well as to the city's visual identity,

most of the existing and potential prime agricultural areas are proposed to be permanently preserved. This is consistent with the County General Plan and the City's past General Plans and Open Space Plans.

Within the area defined as the urban expansion area, land use proposals call for the enhancement and protection of existing commercial areas and residential neighborhoods. At the same time, in certain areas, densities or intensity of land use may have to be increased to encourage in-filling. This policy must be carefully monitored to ensure that new densities are compatible with adjacent areas and do not cause land use transition throughout an area. The concept of raising densities to encourage in-filling or to stimulate development in an area is important to this plan, but it must not be used as a blanket consent for rezoning every vacant parcel in the city. A simple concept like this can become a real detriment to neighborhood preservation if it is abused.

Finally, it is intended that the General Plan policies and land use designations be amended to provide for additional urban land only when it can be clearly demonstrated that: 1) the supply in an appropriate area is insufficient to permit a reasonable choice of sites for new development of suitable uses; 2) scattered development will not result, and 3) any new urban land is in environmentally safe areas. As will be discussed in Chapter 9 on implementing the General Plan, it is very important for the City to follow a regular review of the adequacy of the Plan and to limit changing the Plan to three times each year. This will permit reasonable and timely occasions for the General Plan to be evaluated and amended as necessary, while discouraging amendments and rezonings designed to allow specific development proposals on an ad hoc basis.

chapter two



URBAN EXPANSION

Introduction
Urban Expansion Policies

CHAPTER 2 URBAN EXPANSION

INTRODUCTION

The urban expansion policies in this chapter are concerned with the location of new development. This is the function of three factors: 1) the amount of growth, 2) the density of the growth, and 3) the distribution of the growth. The policies and recommendations are based on various methods of predicting the amount of growth the city will try to accommodate during the next decade. The policies are primarily concerned with the density and distribution of this range of predicted growth. The actual statistical information is contained in the Statistical Appendices of this Plan.

The policies are based on the underlying goals of conservation and efficiency. Like many other growing cities in the Central Valley, Merced has its origins tied directly to agricultural production. As the urban area grows, it inevitably expands into areas of previous agricultural production. Unlike many cities in the Valley faced with this dilemma, Merced is not completely surrounded by the highly productive or agriculturally significant prime soils. While the question of what constitutes "prime agricultural soil" is debatable, the Soils Map (Figure 2-A) is a reliable reference for identifying areas around the city which are subject to pressures of urbanization yet are of significant agricultural importance. This Plan directs growth away from these areas which are worth permanently preserving. Other areas on the city's fringe contain less suitable soils for agriculture towards which the city's growth is directed. Conservation of agriculturally productive areas is of primary importance to the economic base of the community, as well as protecting the long-term ability of the region to produce food and fiber.

The intent of this portion of the urban expansion policies is to reduce the demand to convert agricultural land to urban uses. This can basically be accomplished by: 1) encouraging in-fill development, 2) increasing the density of new development, and 3) reducing the pressure for urbanization by directing public services to areas made up of non-prime soils (see Figure 2-B).

It is also a primary goal of the urban expansion policies to make future development as efficient as possible. Carrying out these various urban development policies will result in both economic savings and energy savings. The beneficiaries of these savings will be the City, the taxpayer, the developer, and other members of the community.

URBAN EXPANSION POLICIES

1. The City should strive to achieve as compact an urban form as possible while designating areas for new urban development which reflect the physical characteristics and environmental constraints of the planning area.

Figure 2-A

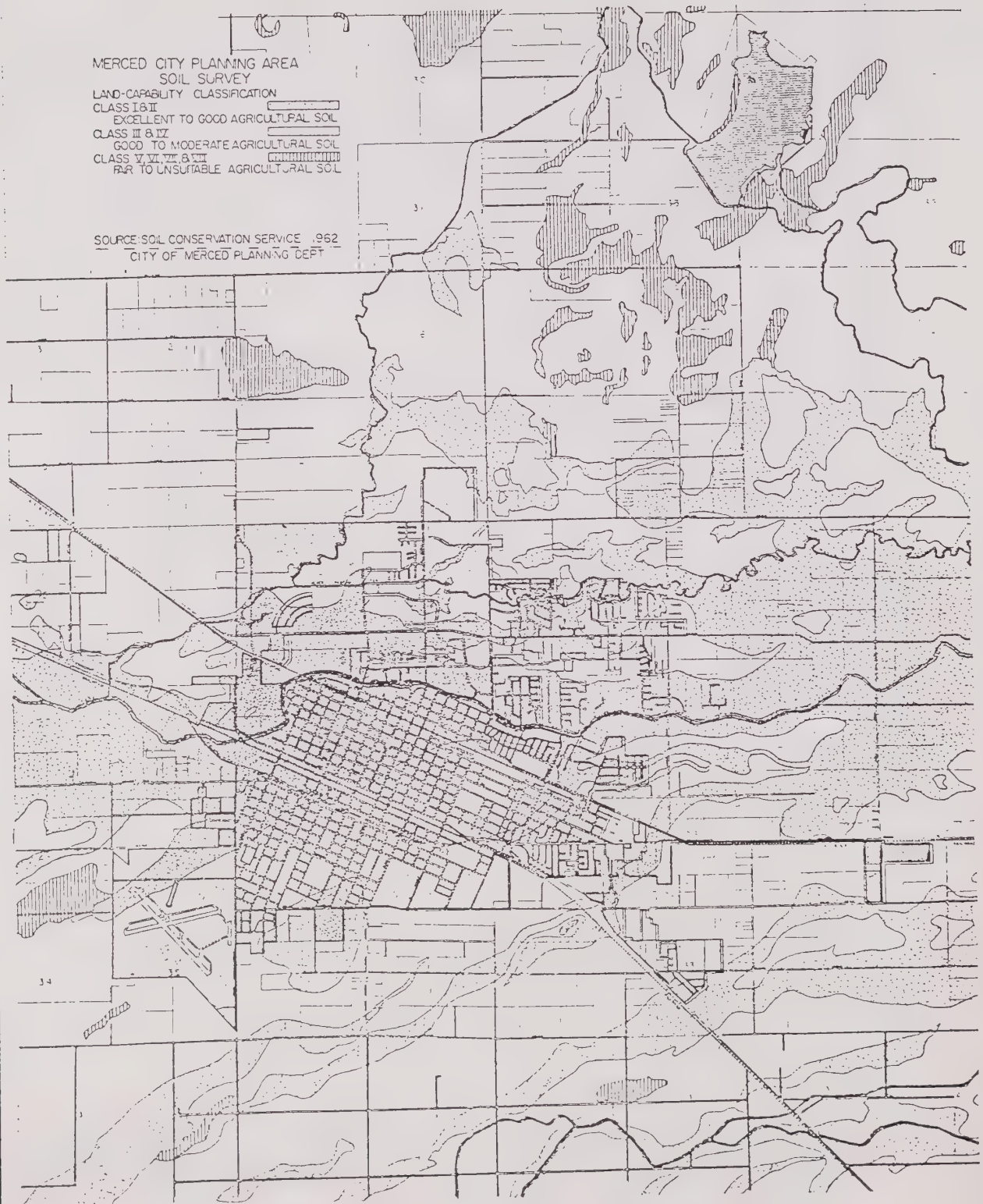
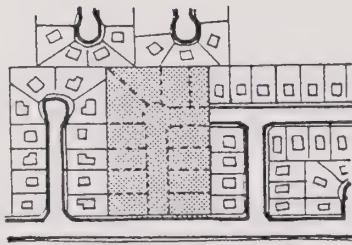
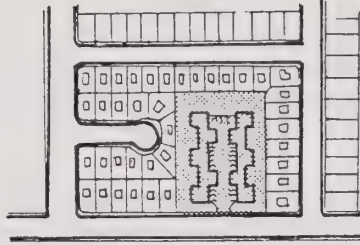


Figure 2-B

IN-FILL DEVELOPMENT



Encourage the use of parcels passed over by new development.

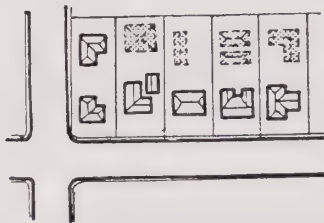


Allow density bonus for quality residential projects on in-fill parcels.

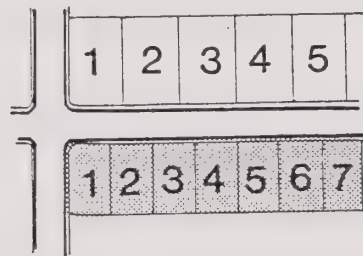


Require annexation and development of contiguous areas within the existing service infra-structure.

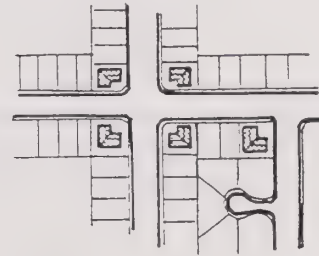
INCREASED DENSITIES



Allow new development on unused portion of existing large lots.



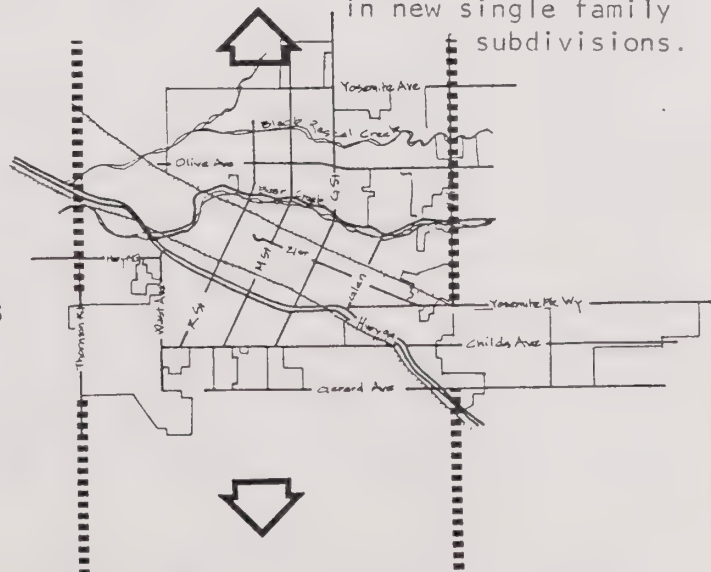
Reduce minimum lot size.



Allow duplexes on selected corner lots in new single family subdivisions.

DIRECT GROWTH AWAY FROM PRIME AGRICULTURAL LANDS

Save prime agricultural lands on the east and west by limiting growth to the north and south only.



- a. Areas with agriculturally suitable soils are not appropriate for urban expansion except where such soils lie within an established urban expansion boundary or urban buffer zone of rural residential development.
 - b. Urban development should reflect the need to protect the water quality of the region and preserve aquifer recharge areas as free of urban development as possible.
 - c. Urban development should be guided so as to allow for future development of flood control projects which will not cause the loss of natural vegetation alteration of existing creeks.
 - d. Areas designated for new urban development should avoid airport clear zones, and certain land uses should be carefully reviewed in areas of high noise level from Castle Air Force Base.
 - e. Areas designated for future development should not cause the loss of existing stands of significant vegetation or alteration of significant riparian habitat.
 - f. Less intense development (for example, single-family housing) should be directed toward the eastern and western fringes of the city.
2. To preserve agriculturally significant areas, the City must try to accommodate urban development pressures on non-prime soils by use of the following methods:
- a. Encourage development on in-fill sites, zoning ordinance amendments, subdivision ordinance amendments, or other methods of encouraging in-fill development.
 - b. Direct future development away from prime agricultural soils.
 - c. Require that all new development occur only within established urban expansion boundaries after annexation.
 - d. Create clearly defined buffer zones, in cooperation with the County, between the City's urban area and the agriculturally significant areas within which unincorporated rural residential development will be allowed.
 - e. Continue to limit the expansion of city services to only those areas within an established urban expansion boundary. In no case should city services be extended into or be extended beyond rural residential buffer zones to serve new urban development outside of an established urban expansion boundary.
 - f. Continue to establish a clear set of procedures for coordinating new development with the County and continue to require

mutual agreement for all amendments to urban expansion boundaries (Specific Urban Development Plan) and rural residential centers.

3. The City should strive to achieve a highly efficient form of urban expansion. The City should control the timing, density, and location of new land uses through the following policies:
 - a. The City should attempt to annex unincorporated urban areas within the urban expansion boundaries which cause a duplication of public services and hinder the extension of city services to new development.
 - b. The City should require that all new development be contiguous to existing urban areas and have reasonable access to public services and facilities.
 - c. The City should adequately plan for public improvements/ services to support the designated land uses for all areas as they become suited for new development. The City should also create the means to swiftly evaluate the cost of providing various services to new development and establish a clear policy for meeting the costs of new development.
 - d. The planning for land uses in newly developing areas should reflect a mixture of land uses which will support a neighborhood, including a variety of residential densities and price ranges, as well as neighborhood and convenience shopping facilities, schools, parks, and other uses necessary at the neighborhood level.
 - e. Plans for new development should stress energy efficiency through both the land uses designated and the distribution of these uses.

chapter three



PRESERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES, OPEN SPACE AND CONSERVATION

Introduction

Preservation of Natural Resources

Open Space

Conservation

CHAPTER 3 PRESERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES, OPEN SPACE, AND CONSERVATION

INTRODUCTION

The Open Space sections and Conservation sections are authorized and mandated portions of the City's General Plan; Preservation of Natural Resources is an optional section. The preservation of natural resources, open space, and conservation are consolidated into this chapter.

Basically, the policies of this chapter deal with the suitability of land within the planning area for urban and nonurban uses. These policies are intended to establish a balance between development and the conservation of the community's natural resources.

Within this context, environmental protection, conservation, and open space serve many purposes. Conservation can serve to protect the natural environment, such as water quality, prime agricultural land, or wildlife habitat; or, to maintain the quality of the living environment in the community. It can also serve to protect the cultural or human resources, which will serve to enhance the quality of life in the community.

One means to conserve and preserve these resources is through the use of "open space" (see Figure 3-A). Government Code Section 65560 defines the four major functions of "open space" as: 1) the preservation of natural resources; 2) the managed production of resources; 3) outdoor recreation; and 4) public health and safety. The open space element addresses these roles by including:

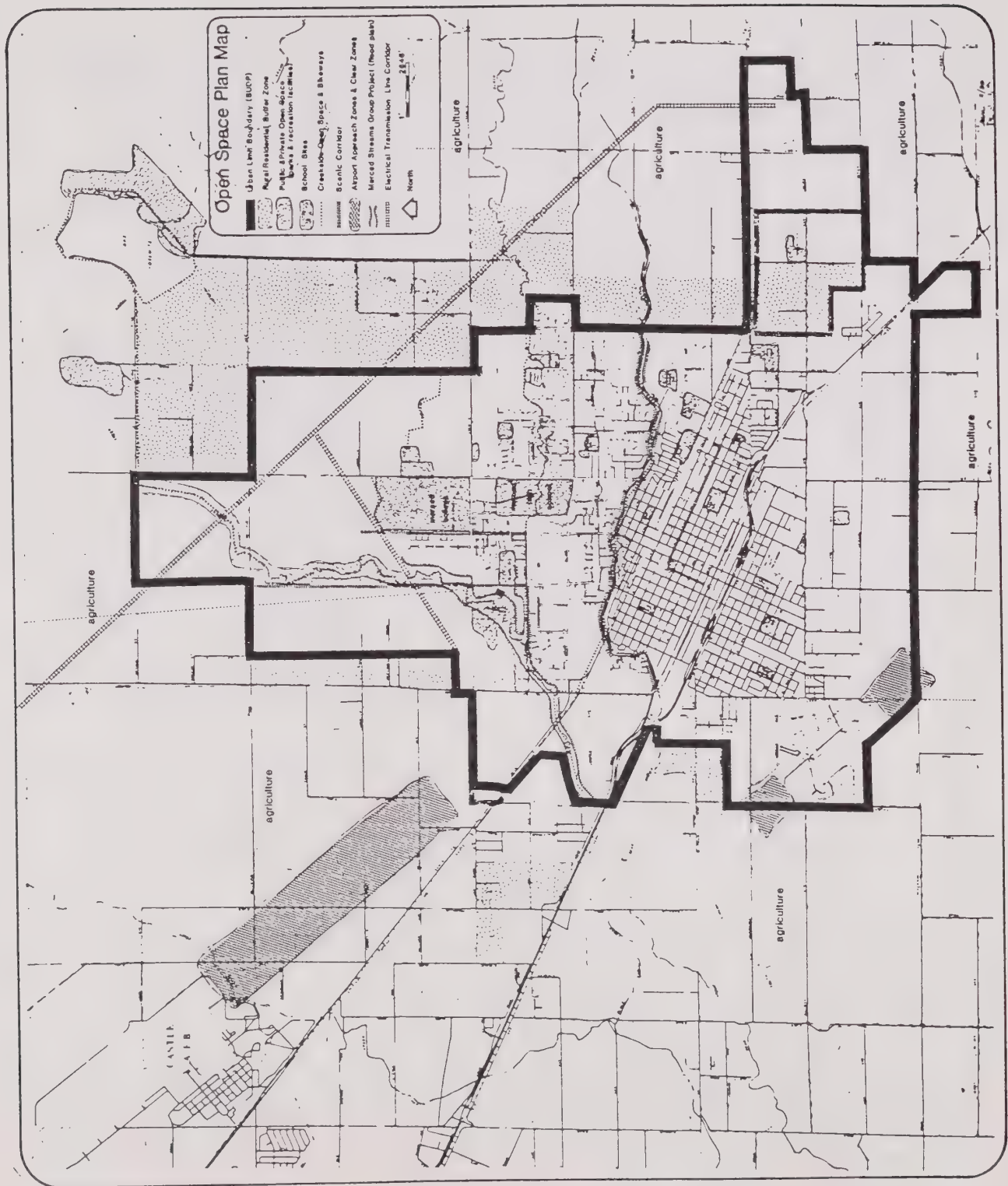
- a. An inventory of privately- and publicly-owned open space lands.
- b. Goals and policies for preserving and managing open space lands.
- c. Specific programs which the legislative body intends to pursue in implementing its open space plan.

In carrying out these requirements, it is the intent of the following policies to establish open space as a functional land use and not a nonuse of the land.

PRESERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES POLICIES

To preserve and manage the natural resources of the planning area for the utilization and benefit of both present and future generations, the City adopts the following policies:

Figure 3-A



1. Encourage and support efforts by Merced County and other public agencies to undertake inventories of existing natural areas within the County for the purpose of taking actions to preserve, enhance, or restore such areas.
2. Maintain existing natural resources in and around the City by establishing programs such as the parks system, urban expansion boundaries, special conservation programs, and other appropriate steps to preserve natural areas.
3. Discourage active recreational uses in and adjacent to significant natural areas which may harm natural resources or wildlife habitat, and to consider means of controlling overuse.
4. In areas designated for development, endeavor to preserve and enhance natural areas through proper site planning.
5. Within the urbanized area, encourage the use of landscaping materials for homes, businesses, and publicly-owned property which could serve wildlife for food, cover, and nesting.
6. Encourage strict regulation of sand and gravel excavation projects in the area in a manner which avoids damage to the environment.
7. Support flood control proposals which demonstrate a reasonable ability to protect the natural resources of the community.
8. Strongly resist concrete channeling of existing creeks and streams as part of any flood project and to support more natural flood control alternatives.

OPEN SPACE POLICIES

A. OPEN SPACE FOR THE MANAGED PRODUCTION OF RESOURCES

To recognize that open space serves an important role in the managed production, processing, and distribution of agricultural products for Merced's economy, as well as the County, the State, and the Nation, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Agriculture is a primary land use because of its significant effect on conserving natural resources, its effect on maintaining open space, and its economic benefits to the community.
2. Preserve significant agricultural soils and relieve the pressures of converting prime agricultural areas to urban uses by directing growth away from these areas and promoting development opportunities on in-fill sites.

B. OPEN SPACE FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

To achieve a sense of natural openness as an integral part of urban surroundings and recognize the outdoor recreational value of open space, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Develop programs to insure that various types of open space are available and reasonably accessible to people of all ages, all social and economic groups, and all geographic areas of the community.
2. Consider density bonuses for development proposals which offer extra parkland dedications where needed.
3. Investigate methods of integrating public and private open spaces in new development.
4. Continue to implement the parks and recreation master plan which will meet the present and future needs of the City and its population.
5. Continue to work with the County and other public agencies to maximize coordination of an overall open space recreational system for the community and ensure maximum efficiency in the use of alternative funding sources for the development and maintenance of open space areas.
6. Encourage further joint use agreements between the City and local school districts to combine park and school facilities when feasible.
7. Encourage future land acquisition for recreational areas in advance of urban development to meet the open space needs of the community and to preserve natural resources, areas of significant vegetation, or wildlife habitat.
8. Continue requiring the dedication of improved land, payment of fees, or both, for park and recreation uses in new residential development.
9. Investigate and adopt a program of integrating small-scale or mini parks in proportion to neighborhood use and demand.
10. Ensure that City parks have open space value as well as recreational value, all new parks should front on public streets on as many sides as possible and not be surrounded by privately-owned property as shown conceptually in Figure 3-B.
11. Continue to acquire and/or require a minimum 50-foot dedication from the centerline (or 25 feet from the crown, whichever is greater) of all creeks within the planning area in order to maintain these open space areas as natural riparian preserves

Figure 3-B

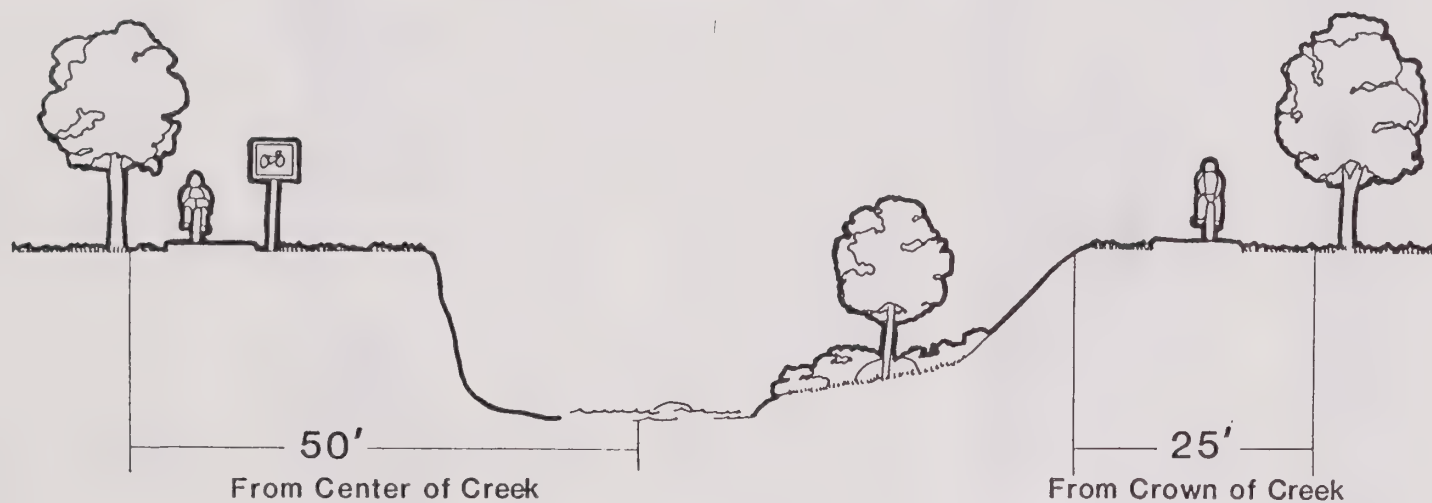
All Parks Should Have Street Frontage And Access –

Like This:



Not This:





BIKE PATH CREEKSIDE DEDICATION REQUIREMENTS
 (50' from center of creek or 25' from crown of creek whichever is greater)

(Figure 3-C). The area along Fahrens Creek and Cottonwood Creek is an exception to this policy where additional open space will be required to accommodate the Merced Streams Group Project overflow channel.

12. Recognize the open space value of selected irrigation canals and to investigate acquiring access to these canals for use as nature trails, fishing, or other recreational activities.
13. Provide for a continuous system of interconnected off-street bikeways (Class I as defined by the State Department of Transportation) in and out of the city for both transportation and recreational use.
14. Recognize the value of street trees and shaded urban parks such as the Courthouse Square, as an integral open space feature of the community, and to further promote and adopt programs which ensure the long-term health and development of a comprehensive street tree program (i.e., selection, planting, and maintenance) for the city.
15. Ensure adequate pedestrian and bicycle access to parks as shown conceptually in Figure 3-B.

C. OPEN SPACE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

To recognize the value of open space for public health and safety because of conditions in an area, protection of water quality, or protection and enhancement of air quality, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Discourage industrial activities which potentially generate environmental hazards (e.g., odors, air pollution, toxic wastes, and water pollution).
2. Continue support of floodplain regulation and control development where it may be dangerous to health, safety, or property due to flooding.
3. Discourage the use of storm drainage holding basins but, if used, they should meet high aesthetic and public safety standards.
4. Encourage the strict enforcement of health standards and carefully control the use of septic tanks within the planning area.
5. Discourage the use of special districts or other small-scale methods of sanitary sewage disposal within the planning area.

6. Continue enforcement of the City's vacant lot weed abatement program to ensure undeveloped areas do not become fire hazards.
7. Continue implementation of the airport master plan with regard to maintaining open space and agricultural uses within airport clear zones.
8. Implement the necessary policies and procedures to avoid unnecessary urban development within the Castle Air Force Base approach and clear zones, and excessively high noise zones.

CONSERVATION POLICIES

A. WATER CONSERVATION

In order to maintain and enhance the community's water quality and quantity, the City adopts the following policies and recommendations:

1. Develop and support local water management programs, including the continued enforcement of all state codes, to ensure a sustained high quality and quantity of groundwater resources.
2. Expand investigation of the use of wastewater as a water resource.

B. AIR QUALITY

In order to restore and maintain a high level of air quality within the community and the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin, the City adopts the following policies:

1. Support local and regional agencies in efforts and programs to achieve the state air quality standards.
2. Develop policies and programs which will reduce traffic congestion and over-dependence on the use of the automobile.
3. Continue the development and improvement of the Merced Transit System and to expand the system to include a monorail or other similar system in future transportation planning.
4. Develop policies and programs which facilitate the use of bicycles and foot traffic for both commuter and recreational purposes.
5. Investigate the feasibility of converting City-owned vehicles to less polluting fuels.
6. Ensure that industrial standards and promotion are not in conflict with regional and state control of air quality performance standards.

C. ENERGY CONSERVATION

In recognition of the ability to cut local energy consumption and provide services more economically and efficiently, the City establishes the following policies for energy conservation:

1. Continue to support and implement urban development policies which will prevent unnecessary urban expansion and encourage a more compact and efficient city form.
2. Encourage all developers and builders to carefully consider the use of solar energy in design and management of all new construction in the City.
3. Require all new subdivisions to maximize, to the extent feasible, proper orientation of lots with regard to solar utilization.
4. Encourage developers and builders to properly design all structures on each building lot in the city to take full advantage of solar use in heating and cooling.
5. Encourage developers and builders to offer solar water and space heating systems as an option on new facilities.
6. Encourage developers and builders to maximize "passive" solar design, such as large south-facing windows for winter heat gains, and overhangs and shading for summer heat protection.
7. Require, where feasible, the use of solar energy design on all new City facilities, including passive and active water heating and space heating systems.
8. Incorporate energy conservation techniques into the design of new public facilities.
9. Pursue further investigation of potential benefits utilizing building code revisions, smaller streets, solar access rights, and other energy-saving techniques.
10. Consider the adoption of requirements for shade trees, other landscaping, and a reduction of pavement whenever feasible to reduce summer cooling energy demands.
11. Institute policies and regulations which encourage modes of transportation other than automobiles and trucks.
12. Investigate and support increased efforts to separate recyclable materials within the City's garbage collection services and support other recycling programs.

13. Continue efforts to require energy-efficient materials and equipment for public improvements required by the City and the purchase of energy-efficient equipment and vehicles by the City.
14. Continue support of community education on techniques for residential and commercial energy conservation.
15. The City should support programs and policies which recognize the value of historic preservation and the rehabilitation of existing residential and commercial buildings as a viable source of direct energy conservation (i.e., rehabilitating an existing building which uses fewer resources and less energy than constructing new buildings).

D. SCENIC RESOURCES CONSERVATION

In order to promote the protection and enhancement of designated scenic routes, establish the following criteria for the identification of scenic routes:

- a. The scenic area through which the corridor passes should possess outstanding scenic, historic, or aesthetic value.
- b. If possible, the scenic corridor should contain a variety of vegetation or landscape types.
- c. Routes of historic significance which connect places of interest should be considered even though the route is of marginal scenic value.
- d. Routes which incorporate outstanding views or vistas should be considered.

The following areas are designated on the General Plan Map and the Open Space Plan Map:

- a. North Bear Creek Drive within the city limits
- b. N Street from 16th to County Courthouse
- c. 21st Street from the County Courthouse to Glen Avenue
- d. M Street from Black Rascal Creek to Cardella Road
- e. West 28th Street from Mercy Hospital to G Street
- f. Lake Road from Yosemite Avenue to Lake Yosemite
- g. R Street from Black Rascal Creek to Bellevue Road

The City establishes the following policies for the protection and development of the community's scenic resources:

1. Specific plans should be prepared for each designated scenic corridor as outlined in the previous guidelines and encourage the multiple use of these routes with such uses as walkways, bike paths, and rest areas.
2. Protect and enhance designated scenic routes in the absence of specific corridor plans using the following guidelines in reviewing any application for development in the vicinity of a designated scenic corridor:
 - a. Undergrounding of Utilities - New or relocated utility lines should be placed underground whenever possible. Consideration should also be given to the underground placement or other relocation of existing overhead lines.
 - b. Stringent Sign Control - The size, height, number, and type of on-premise signs allowed should be the minimum necessary for identification and reflect the proportionate and orderly appearance of advertising in relation to the environment. The design, materials, colors, texture, and/or location should also relate to their surrounding physical environment. No off-premise outdoor advertising should be permitted, and provisions should be made for eliminating nonconformities.
 - c. Regulating Future Land Uses - Regulating land uses to prevent the intrusion of incompatible uses which may detract from the scenic quality of the corridor is essential. By limiting densities and access along these corridors, the "scenic experience" will be enhanced.
 - d. Screening of Offensive Land Uses - Existing or indispensable offensive land uses should be screened from view, or inconspicuously located if within a scenic corridor. Effective screening can be accomplished by proper use of planting, grading, and fencing.
 - e. Preserving Views or Vistas - Heights and setbacks of buildings should be regulated so as not to obstruct outstanding views.
 - f. Preserving Vegetative Cover - Every effort should be made to preserve existing stands of trees, and other plant materials of outstanding value, and maintain them properly.
 - g. Property Maintenance - Structures on private or public properties visible within the corridor should be maintained in good condition. The grounds should be kept free from trash, undesirable growth, or other objectionable uses.
 - h. Development Design - Architectural and landscape architectural design and site planning should result in an attrac-

tive appearance and a harmonious relationship with surrounding development.

- i. Vehicle Control - Overcrowding of vehicles onto scenic corridors should be avoided. The use of corridors for major collector streets or higher order streets should be avoided where possible.
3. Develop methods of preventing urban expansion into agriculturally significant areas which serve to define the urban area and create a sense of "community."

E. HISTORIC AND CULTURAL CONSERVATION

Cultural resources, like natural resources, are vital to the well-being of the community. Through recognition of historic value and the establishment of the following policies, the community can enjoy the cultural, social, economic, and planning benefits which can result from preservation efforts:

1. Initiate and maintain an inventory of cultural, historic, and architecturally significant resources within the City and the planning area.
2. Encourage programs and persons to maintain or restore historic or architecturally significant structures.
3. Investigate the possibility of revising or adding flexibility to existing codes and ordinances which act as disincentives or deterrents to preservation or rehabilitation efforts.
4. Coordinate public programs, such as the downtown revitalization project, so that policies for the preservation of historic or architecturally significant structures are fully recognized.
5. Investigate the possibility of forming a citizens committee to review and make recommendations for the official recognition of historic sites and cultural resources within the community.
6. Encourage the County and other public agencies to preserve and develop historic features within the planning area.
7. Investigate and consider the possibility of using historic overlay zones in conjunction with an historic preservation ordinance to control the use or modification of significant historic areas in the community.
8. Maintain an inventory of known archaeological sites in the immediate area.
9. Protect any unexcavated archaeological sites until they can be properly excavated, including any discovered during City or private construction projects.

10. If appropriate, consider reconstruction of archaeological sites in city parks, on school grounds, in open space areas, or other suitable locations where they can serve an educational purpose.

chapter four



RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

Housing Problems

Residential Environment

CHAPTER 4 THE RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

This Chapter is divided into two areas of concern. The first section addresses the various housing problems facing the City now and in the future. The second portion discusses the issues and policies related to the development and maintenance of the residential environment or the character of neighborhood living environments within the community.

This Chapter and related appendices contain requirements to comply with Article 10.6 of the California Government Code concerning mandated State housing elements. Information contained herein serves as a revision of the City's previously adopted Housing Element under Government Code Section 65302 and the 1977 Housing Element Guidelines. Housing guidelines contained in the Chapter were prepared through joint cooperation among the Merced City Council, citizens of Merced, and the Merced Planning Commission. The draft Housing Element was presented and reviewed at two public hearings held during a Planning Commission and City Council meeting where public comment was invited. In addition, approximately fifty public agencies received the draft Housing Element for comment and review prior to its adoption. Information relating to Housing Element compliance will be updated as the need dictates, but not less than every five years.

HOUSING

The issue of housing is a primary concern of the General Plan. At the same time, it is one of the more complex issues which makes very specific predictions and solutions difficult. Future housing is a dependent variable, that is, the levels of housing supply and demand are directly influenced by many factors. These effects on housing range from events and trends starting at the local level and proceeding to the national level.

The demand for and supply of housing is determined by many factors and in order to adequately plan for the housing needs of the community, it is necessary to project supply and demand over both short- and long-term periods. However, the rate of household formation is affected by a variety of influences, such as natural population increase, net immigration, changes in household size, availability of mortgage funding, and employment opportunities. Housing supply will also be affected to a limited extent by demolitions, seasonal housing, vacancy rates, and mobile homes. Generally, though, the housing supply can be measured by the level of new construction. With this assumption, housing needs are projected based on the long-range trend of moderate but steady growth in Merced. The City has experienced varied population and housing growth rates, with only slight growth in the 1960's to growth on more dramatic levels in the 1980's (see Appendices for population and housing statistics). As the factors affecting housing change and new information becomes available (e.g., Federal Census data), long-range projections made for the planning period (to the year 2005) will also change and must be continually updated to maintain the value of the General Plan as a decision-making tool.

HOUSING PROBLEMS

The provision of adequate housing for all segments of the community has been increasingly delegated to the state and local governments. In order to assist the City in meeting these responsibilities, the General Plan summarizes the community's housing problems, and recommends action programs to meet these needs. In compliance with Housing Element provisions, a six-year Housing Implementation Program is contained in Chapter Nine of this General Plan. In addition, Housing Element "Quantified Objectives" are contained in Appendix 13.

Generally, Merced has not had any unusual or severe housing problems in the past. The housing problems of the past and those expected in the future are common to many communities, and are listed below:

1. Affordability

- a. Low Income Families

Overpayment for housing has been a major problem in Merced which can be documented by Federal Census data (see Appendix 11). During high inflationary periods, the problem escalates. Census figures also indicate that a significant number of female-headed households with children are below the poverty threshold (see Appendices 9 and 10 for poverty and city income statistics).

There are no permanent emergency shelter facilities available in the City. The County's Adult Protective Services Department administers State funds to supply emergency shelter in a motel for up to one night. In the past, the Salvation Army has received and administered Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) funding of six months' duration. When funds are available through the City's Ministerial Association, the Police Department administers an emergency shelter fund which supplies a motel room for up to one night.

Currently, there are three programs available in Merced County specifically directed to farmworker housing. The FMHA 514-516 Program provides assistance to public or private non-profit organizations to develop farm labor housing. The State HCD Farmworker Housing Grant Fund provides matching funds to the same organizations for new construction or rehabilitation of housing. The State Office of Migrant Services through the Department of Housing and Community Development operates two migrant farmworker housing centers in the County. Generally, farmworker households are concentrated in the unincorporated areas of the County, eliminating a lengthy travel time to the fields where the workers find jobs.

These special households constitute planning concerns and the City must continue to insure that affordable housing is available for all low income groups.

b. Seniors on Fixed Income

Where seniors live on generally fixed income, housing problems may occur. For example, seniors, in caring for or improving their homes, may not have the necessary income to make needed repairs and improvements. Many of the elderly in this situation cannot afford to sell their houses and move to other residences; therefore, they may be faced with living in substandard housing. Moreover, where seniors are able to adequately maintain and improve their property, they can be faced with increased property taxes which can add an additional burden for the fixed income household.

As renters, the city has a very limited supply of units available specifically for senior citizens. Whether through rent subsidies or direct housing assistance, generally the elderly must compete with all other groups in the community for affordable housing at this time (see Appendix 7 for statistics on elderly and handicapped householders).

c. Middle Income Families

In the past, the ratio of home price to annual income has been 2.5; that is, the home price should not exceed 2.5 times the family annual income (see Appendices 30 and 31 for City housing costs).

Recent increases in the price of owned housing has stretched this "rule of thumb" to 3.0 as the reasons for owning a house have taken on new meanings besides shelter alone. Home ownership is also seen as a good investment and a hedge against inflation. Even with the increased commitment of personal income for monthly mortgage payments, there is an increasing number of moderate and middle income families who are unable to afford the desired type of housing. This may have a long-term effect on the character of Merced which has had a majority of the population living in owned housing.

d. Refugees

Merced, similar to other cities in California and other states, has experienced a significant wave of refugee migration from Southeast Asia within the last five years. Although 1980 Federal Census data do not accurately reflect their numbers, it appears many refugees are settling in Merced as secondary migrants from other regions in the state and country. Typically, their family size and low incomes limit their housing oppor-

tunities and many refugees live in overcrowded and substandard housing units. Catholic Social Services, in conjunction with the Merced County Refugee Services office, assists refugee families in locating housing and acts as an intermediary for refugees with landlords. Future census data should help identify the number of refugees living within the city limits.

2. Vacancy Rates

Census figures also indicate housing vacancy rates (see Appendix 15). Construction of apartments and single-family units has been able to meet the demand of the City's increasing population and has increased the supply of units in the City.

Rapid increases in employment causing new families to come into the area, such as a new industry locating in the community or a sudden increase in personnel at Castle Air Force Base, could have severe effects on the vacancy rates in Merced (see Appendices 37 and 38 for employment statistics). A low vacancy rate is made worse during periods of high inflation and lack of financing. Vacancy rates in single-family owner-occupied housing are watched very carefully by the home building industry. For rental housing, high interest rates, small profit margins on rental units, and other factors may tend to limit new apartment construction.

3. Socio-Economic Divisions in the Community

Growth in Merced, like many other communities, has not been evenly distributed in the city. Most of the growth in the last decade (approximately 65 percent) has occurred in North Merced. North Merced also has a higher number of white residents and a low number of Mexican-Americans and black residents. More than two-thirds of the racial and ethnic minorities live in South Merced (see Appendix 6 for the City's racial/ethnic breakdown and Appendix 8 for overcrowded households).

Just as North Merced can be distinguished from South Merced on the basis of racial composition, the two areas can also be distinguished on an economic level. North Merced is significantly above the City's median income level, while the median income level for households in South Merced is relatively low.

4. Constraints to Housing

Governmental constraints to housing, such as the application of land use and development controls and costs associated with permit processing and provision of public facilities, are direct and indirect costs increasing the price of housing development. The City's application of land use and development controls are the minimum necessary to protect the safety and welfare of City residents and resemble other similar size

cities in Northern California. Fees charged for permit processing are levied to cover the cost of building inspection. New construction permit approvals are expeditiously processed in City departments so as to minimize time delays which increase development costs. A survey of fees in Merced and other similar size cities in Northern California is illustrated in Appendix 31.

Nongovernmental constraints, such as the cost of financing the purchase or construction of housing, drive up home costs and are external forces which local policies cannot control. Increased costs of labor and building materials also adversely affect the cost of housing. Other areas that drive up housing cost include marketing and developer profits (see Appendix 30 for land and housing costs).

HOUSING POLICIES

With the given information on current and projected housing problems in the City of Merced, a variety of public and private efforts will be required to meet the housing needs of Merced's residents. To take an active housing role in coordinating private housing efforts and in directly aiding local residents with critical housing assistance needs, the City establishes the following policies (see also the City's six-year Housing Implementation Program in Chapter Nine, Figure 9-B, of this General Plan):

1. Promote adequate housing for low income families, senior citizens, and other groups (see also Appendix 13 for Housing Element "Quantified Objectives").
2. Encourage a variety of housing types, densities, and price ranges, to include low and moderate income units, while preserving the character of individual neighborhoods. To encourage this, the City will continue efforts which enable developers to include low and moderate income housing units in their development proposals.
3. Encourage the conservation and rehabilitation of the housing stock in the City through a balanced program of code enforcement and complementary programs designed to assist property improvement by neighborhood residents (see Appendices 32 and 33 for descriptions of the City's Housing Improvement Program and Redevelopment Agency).
4. Recognize the importance of innovative housing construction techniques and supports the development of mobile home parks, modular homes, and condominium developments in suitable locations subject to the appropriate review considerations.
5. Monitor and improve the quality of housing data, and coordinate with appropriate local, regional, state and federal entities in developing reliable assessments of future housing assistance needs.

6. Support research programs which investigate innovative techniques and other means of reducing housing costs. In particular, an effort shall be made to reduce residential energy use within the City and to help decrease housing costs and conserve the resource.
7. Encourages a variety of low income housing in the community and should, where feasible, be located in small projects evenly distributed throughout the community.
8. Consider rental units to be an integral part of the low and moderate income housing needs, and approval of higher density complexes should consider adequate design for families with children.
9. Provide decent housing in a satisfying environment for all persons, regardless of age, race, sex, marital status, ethnic background, income or other arbitrary factors.

RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT

One of Merced's major assets lies in its older, well established residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods often lie in close proximity to commercial or office areas and are subject to pressures for conversion to non-residential uses. Moreover, where the zoning has allowed higher residential densities to be constructed, serious impacts from traffic, parking and noise have intruded into these otherwise stable neighborhoods. These changes do not happen overnight and are often characterized by lot-by-lot incremental changes in use or zoning. However, the City has recognized these disturbing factors and is taking steps to prevent the deterioration of its well established neighborhoods through strong neighborhood preservation policies and housing rehabilitation programs.

With the same concern, the City is striving to carefully evaluate all new development in order to create new neighborhoods with the same valued characteristics which are a part of Merced's older residential areas. Some of these characteristics which are often pointed to with pride are the streets lined with a canopy of mature trees, a variety of architectural styles, well maintained exteriors and landscaping, controlled traffic levels, and convenient location of schools and parks.

Analysis of residential construction trends in Merced indicates a definite trend toward higher density development. Because this trend will likely continue to be strong, new forms of housing are appearing and are being accommodated. In the past, the residential market could be easily grouped into basically two groups, single-family detached homes or apartments. The role of duplexes and mobile homes, although no less important, has not been a significant part of Merced's housing market. The newer forms of higher density housing expected to be seen more in Merced over the next 20 years include condominiums, zero-lot-line homes, patio homes, and town houses. These indicate new types of development as well as new types of ownership.

The data from past residential development in conjunction with information from the State as a whole (contained in the Appendices) can lead to some general residential trends to be expected over the planning period. The trends indicate that the ratio of traditional single-family detached homes to other types of higher density residential development will continue to even out. The number of building permits in the last decade indicate a long-range trend toward more higher density types of development. The rate of multi-family building permits issued is likely to continue to increase along with single-family permits as the city continues to grow, but at a higher annual rate. The net result will be that at sometime in the next 10 to 20 years, it can be expected that the net total number of multi-family units will gradually approach and perhaps surpass the number of single-family units (see Appendices 14 and 16 to 18 for residential land inventory, housing unit projections, and housing need).

This trend toward a greater percentage of higher density housing will cause the need to accommodate the placement of new multi-family development in the urban expansion areas, as well as on in-fill sites. Even with increased densities, single-family development will still account for 4 to 5 times the amount of land required for the projected higher density development. This fact, plus the long-term nature of this trend, will cause the physical changes in the residential character of the City to be gradual. Policies reflecting how the City will deal with these changes are included in the Residential Policies section of this chapter.

RESIDENTIAL LAND USE CATEGORIES

For purposes of identifying and locating the various housing types in the city, the following land use categories are established (see Figure 4-A).

Rural Residential (RR) - This designation allows for very large lot, rural living primarily in adjacent county buffer zones on the west and east sides of the City's growth area (SUDP). These are permanently designated rural residential areas which act as transition zones between the denser urban area and permanent open space/-agricultural lands. No services such as water and sewer facilities are to be provided or extended into these areas.

Low Density Residential (LD) - This designation allows for single-family residential dwellings with average lot sizes ranging from 6,000 to 10,000 square feet. This is where the traditional single-family home would be located but there could be a diversity of single-family housing types (such as condominium and zero-lot-line) with densities between 2 to 6 units per gross acre. This designation is located throughout the city with lower densities typically toward the edges of the growth area adjacent to the buffer zones or in special areas such as along scenic corridors. Also, they can be located along major streets with special designs (e.g., open-end cul-de-sacs). These areas and all higher densities are to be served with sewer, water and other city services.

Low-Medium Density Residential (LMD) - This designation typically allows for two-family dwellings with 6,000±-square-foot lot sizes. Variations in housing types allowed here are fourplexes, triplexes, duplexes, condominiums, zero-lot-line as well as single-family detached units on appropriate sized lots with densities between 6 to 12 units per gross acre. This type of designation is normally encouraged away from the agricultural buffer areas, close to commercial or other services, adjacent to parks, on in-fill sites and along major streets for convenient access (but not necessarily as a buffer).

High-Medium Density Residential (HMD) - This designation provides areas for multi-family development such as apartments, higher density triplex/fourplex units, and condominiums. Densities range from 12 to 24 units per gross acre. This designation is located well away from the buffer areas on some in-fill sites, adjacent to commercial and other service/work areas, near parks and other amenities, and along major streets for convenient access (but not necessarily as a buffer).

High Density Residential (HD) - This designation is for the highest multi-family residential densities typically found only in limited areas of the city well away from buffer areas near commercial or other similar uses. Densities are normally between 24 to 36 units per gross acre; generally considered too high a density for Merced's living environment.

Residential Mobile Home Park (RMH) - These areas are designed for mobile home parks where detached single-family mobile homes may be located. Density ranges 6 to 10 units per gross acre.

RESIDENTIAL POLICIES








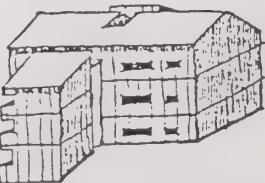

To enhance the quality of life for all Merced residents, through the creation and maintenance of well designed and appropriately served residential environments, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Through the General Plan map, residential areas are delineated by natural and/or man-made features, community facilities, recreation areas, schools, public transportation facilities, and shopping. Ethnic and economic boundaries are discouraged.
2. Protect and mitigate where practical residential areas from excessive noise, odors, dirt, glare, and other unattractive influences resulting from heavy traffic, incompatible uses of adjacent properties, or aircraft flight patterns.
3. Conserve those residential areas that are threatened by blighting influences and revitalize areas which are seriously deteriorated by promoting a continuous housing rehabilitation program and other means.

4. Provide and encourage attractive park and recreation facilities, designed and located in such a way as to promote neighborhood interest and appreciation. Where possible, these facilities should be combined with schools or other similar open space.
5. Continue to require new housing developments to provide underground utilities, streets, parks, and related improvements suitable to the project's density.
6. Encourage a diversity of building types, ownership types, designs and site plans throughout the city on designated sites.
7. Continue to pursue quality (but not necessarily expensive) residential development, including review of architecture, landscaping, public improvements, common open space and maintenance.
8. Encourage policies and programs which preserve Merced's aesthetically and historically significant neighborhoods and/or structures, and protect them from incompatible development.
9. In order to meet the convenience shopping needs of residential neighborhoods, proper locations for neighborhood shopping facilities as shown on the General Plan map prior to the development of new areas to minimize later concerns from adjacent residents.
10. Recognize the importance of mobile homes as a source of owned housing (sites that allow mobile homes are shown on the General Plan map).
11. Continue to encourage the use of various design and site planning measures which improve the security of residential buildings and sites.
12. Continue large lot parcel zoning along Bear Creek (10,000- to 15,000-square-foot minimum).
13. Attempt to preserve housing units and enhance residential neighborhoods throughout the City of Merced.
14. Continue where practical to designate new housing development in areas not impacted by a high level of jet aircraft noise from Castle Air Force Base and the Merced Municipal Airport.

Figure 4-A

HOUSING TYPE RANGE

DESCRIPTION	LAND USE DESIGNATION	ZONING CLASSIFICATION
 rural single family detached	rural residential less than 2 DU/ gross acre	County A-R A-T-5 RP-D
 single family detached	low density residential 2 to 6 DU/gross acre	R-1-10 R-1-6 RP-D
 single family semi-detached and zero-lot-line		
 duplex	low medium density residential 6 to 12 DU/gross acre	R-2 RP-D
 townhouse		
 fourplex	high medium density residential 12 to 24 DU/gross acre	R-3-2 R-3-1.5 RP-D
 two-story apartment		
 three-story and highrise apartment	high density residential 24 to 36 DU/gross acre	R-4 RP-D
 mobilehome	mobile home park 6 to 10 DU/gross acre	R-MH

chapter five



ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

Industrial and Heavy Commercial Areas

Commercial Areas

CHAPTER 5 ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

The economic environment of Merced, like other local jurisdictions, consists of a number of interconnected elements. It is also influenced by a variety of factors which can range from the overall health of the national economy to local decisions. This portion of the General Plan summarizes those factors which affect the local economy and briefly analyzes what makes the local economy function. By isolating the different segments of the economy, those factors which can be realistically affected within the context of the General Plan are identified. From there, policies and recommendations are proposed which will encourage the improvement and long-range stabilization of Merced's economy as reflected in the General Plan.

The emphasis in analyzing the existing economy will be to clarify the makeup of Merced's present economy. This will point out some deficiencies and directions which should be proposed for the future. Because economic predictions are often inaccurate beyond a short-term period (e.g., five years), the General Plan does not attempt to make long-range predictions or projections. Also, to avoid unnecessary confusion, the majority of the statistical data prepared as background research for this portion of the General Plan is located in the Statistical Appendices, and is only referenced or summarized in this chapter.

ANALYSIS

The City of Merced is likely to continue to be the commercial, financial, and governmental center for Merced County during the coming years. It remains relatively autonomous and centrally located between the competitive trade centers of Fresno to the south and Modesto to the north. The community contains the heaviest population concentration in the County, and the City's role as a regional trade center is strengthened by its position as the County seat. This can be seen in the fact that the City consistently captures the majority of the County's total retail sales while accounting for only about one-quarter of the total County population.

By far, the two key segments of Merced's economy and labor force are agriculture and government. Each of these categories individually accounts for over one-third of the County's civilian employment. Not included in these figures are the over 5,000 military personnel at Castle Air Force Base. The military personnel at Castle Air Force Base, plus other government employees (federal, state, local government, and education), make up about one-half of the County's total non-agricultural labor force. In addition, there are over 2,000 retired military personnel in the County who receive over \$20 million in benefits each year. A majority of these retirees live in the Merced/Atwater area and represent a significant part of the local economy, and the part-time or under-employed labor force. This heavily weighted government labor force and payroll accounts for a large part in the relative stability and continued slow growth of the community in spite of the more variable outside economic trends affecting the national and state economy.

Agricultural employment is also historically a source of long-term stability for the local economy.

The seasonal fluctuations of agricultural employment and the food processing industry is often noted as a deficiency in the local economy and is a cause of short-term variations in the local unemployment rates. Overall, unemployment in the county, which is reflective of the city as well, runs consistently above the state-wide unemployment rate. This is also true for most counties throughout the Central Valley. With the lack of large scale industrial development in the community, the increased unemployment rates can be attributed to a population which has continued to expand without a proportional increase in industrial jobs. Like other Central Valley communities, the current population growth comes from the large number of people born in the 1950's reaching working age, increasing proportions of women entering the work force, and the Central Valley's relatively high levels of in-migration (as compared to state-wide in-migration). While the effects of the "post-war baby boom" will likely pass by the 1990's, the two-income family and in-migration to the Central Valley are trends that will continue to pressure the labor force through this planning period and on into the next century.

To achieve lower unemployment rates in the community, the City must play an active role in job development. Since 1960, the County employment data has shown a steadily increasing ratio of services-producing employment to goods-producing employment. Services-producing employment includes jobs in government, services, wholesale trade, retail trade, transportation, public utilities, finance, insurance, and real estate. The basic job categories for goods-producing employment are agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and mining. The development of industrial or manufacturing jobs will have a multiplier effect by generating other services-producing employment. Also, the increasing ratio of service-producing employment to goods-producing employment demonstrates an increasing urbanization of the area with clear trends away from a totally agricultural economy. As Merced's role as an urban center in the Central Valley increases, so will its role as a government and trade center for the County. Increased personal income from non-agricultural employment and an increasing population, even at slow non-industrially induced rates, will continue to stimulate the services-producing employment sectors of the local economy.

The economic health of the community can provide choice, convenience, and employment for the residents of Merced, along with profits for the developer and businessmen. The General Plan can be an integral part of this economic environment by clarifying the community's goals and outlining a set of action policies. This will serve to assist both the local decision-makers and the investor/developer by clearly stating the City's position towards economic development. The following sections of this chapter will address the community's economic environment and organize some of the commercial and industrial development concepts according to functional and design criteria. This will include policies which should guide decisions regarding commercial and industrial development, discussion of how these policies are reflected in the General Plan, and some suggested actions designed to carry out the economic goals of the City within the context of the General Plan.

INDUSTRIAL AND HEAVY COMMERCIAL AREAS

It is a primary goal of the General Plan to protect and properly utilize the existing industrial areas in Merced from preemption by non-industrially related uses and to encourage further development of appropriate industrial and heavy commercial uses. Heavy commercial uses include land intensive operations such as lumberyards, automobile wrecking yards, mobile home sales lots, farm equipment sales, building supplies, and heavy equipment repair. Most heavy commercial uses are compatible with industrial processing, assembling and manufacturing, warehousing, and transport operations. Both industrial and heavy commercial uses may involve transport of materials by heavy trucks and require large loading and docking areas. In the past, not enough attention has been given to properly locating heavy commercial uses which are not quite acceptable in industrial zones, yet difficult to mitigate in commercial areas. The recognition of heavy commercial uses as a separate and important land use entity closely tied to industrial land uses will be a key element in promoting and encouraging a healthy economic environment for the community.

A second key issue in the economic environment of the City is that industry, unlike housing and business, is one private land use which needs early attention in a comprehensive plan. The locational requirements and land needs of modern industrial facilities cannot be satisfied with land "left over" after all other uses have been designated on the land use map. One objective of the industrial policies in this chapter is to underscore the importance of industrial areas in the City's land use planning process and to clarify industry's needs and problems.

In addition to locating sites for industrial and heavy commercial development, it is crucial that undesirable commercial or industrial uses should be mitigated or isolated to reduce their displeasing influence. The best way to achieve this goal is through the proper use of the City's three existing industrial areas, the Eastern Industrial Area reserved for heavy industry, and the two basically light manufacturing areas located at the Merced Airport and the Southern Pacific Industrial area on the west side of the City. In order to seriously promote this goal, the City must seek cooperation with Merced County to avoid further industrial development in unincorporated fringe areas. The City, in turn, must guide industrial development to established industrial parks and protect industrial reserves from premature development or encroachment by other incompatible land uses (e.g., residential or retail commercial uses).

The above goal of designating clearly defined and regulated modern industrial areas is not a new goal for the City; it appeared in both the 1959 and 1968 General Plans. Merely designating areas which are available for heavy commercial and/or industrial development on the land use map, will not attract commercial and industrial businesses to Merced. Aside from the large scale economic issues, few firms are free to locate wherever they choose. Site selection for major capital investments is influenced by many factors including wage scales, local cost of living, utility rates, tax levels, and transportation costs. Resource based manufacturing and processing plants must also be near raw materials, and have access to processed material suppliers and fabricators of components

used in the industry. Where transportation represents a major element of production cost and where other factors permit it, industries tend to select sites close to the markets they serve. The availability of a suitable labor force is also a significant determinant in site selection for many specialized industries. All of these tangible factors play a major role in site selection; some can be influenced by the General Plan, and others cannot.

The last key issue related to the role of the General Plan in development of industry in the City pertains to the less tangible elements which are also crucial in promoting economic growth as stated below:

"A growing proportion of business enterprises is strongly influenced by the character of the community in choosing a location. Among paramount concerns are an adequate housing supply, freedom from deterioration and blight, the quality of the schools and other public facilities and services, and the availability of cultural and recreational resources.

The less dependent a business is on such factors as sources of raw materials, availability of transportation, and proximity to market, the greater is its concern with characteristics of the community. Indeed, if a location is chosen that offers a pleasant way of life at a reasonable cost, personnel with necessary skills will usually migrate there to fill available jobs." (The Practice of Local Government Planning, 1979, pg. 247).

It is the larger community-wide role of the General Plan which must be perceived in order to fulfill the City's economic goals. In addition to land use designations, it will be the overall success of the City's ability to carry out the goals of all the General Plan Elements which will be important to promoting economic growth. For example, industries will not pick sites where their operations are likely to result in complaints from nearby residents, or where a firm's own traffic must strongly compete with other traffic using the same routes. The comparative economics of Merced's competitors will continue to make industrial promotion a challenge, yet the City's ability to present a clean, trim appearance with efficient government and service levels will offer the best chance to make Merced more attractive than its competitors.

INDUSTRIAL AND HEAVY COMMERCIAL POLICIES

To maintain a commitment to reasonable industrial growth which will enhance the environmental quality in industrial areas while preventing adverse effects on the balance of the community, the City establishes the following industrial and heavy commercial land use policies:

A. INDUSTRIAL POLICIES

1. In encouraging industrial development in Merced, an emphasis will be on attracting industries which can offer employment to offset the problems associated with seasonal employment in the community.

2. Emphasis should be placed on development of new industries which are non-polluting.
3. Work closely with the County to ensure that existing industrial parks are developed prior to the use of industrial reserve areas and non-industrial land.
4. Every effort should be made through careful land use decisions to maximize existing and reserve industrial sites having access to air transportation, railroad and major highway transportation links which are vital to good industrial development.
5. Industrial land use decisions should carefully allow for inter-dependent industries to locate in close proximity to take advantage of potential operating efficiencies, as demonstrated by the Ragu and Rheem facilities in the Southern Pacific Industrial area.
6. In planning for industrial reserve areas, flexibility should be the key determinant because it is impossible to predict the precise site requirements for individual plants. Parcels of land should remain as large as possible to accommodate a variety of plant sizes and types in the future.
7. Industrial reserve areas should reflect existing environmental conditions such as locating in high noise level areas, downwind from the City, and not locating in prime agricultural areas.
8. Work with the County to ensure that all locations in the planning area designated for industrial use or industrial reserve are within the City's urban expansion area. This should require that all future industrial development in the Merced area occurs after annexation to the City.
9. Investigate the possibility of regulating industrial development on the basis of performance standards. In order to obtain a permit, two sets of standards, one for performance or operation and the other for design, would have to be satisfied. Included in the development of performance standards should be a serious consideration of methods to ensure that energy conservation elements are integrated into any new industrial facilities.
10. Areas designated for industrial reserve should be protected from non-industrial and premature development through zoning or rezoning for agricultural use until it can be determined that there is adequate need and that services are available for the proper full scale development at which time rezoning to industrial zones only should be allowed.
11. When industrial areas develop, consideration should be given to provide attractive, efficient, and affordable means of mass transit from and to residential areas in the City.

12. Consider adopting a local ordinance to require that a pre-determined level of visual quality be maintained in all industrial and heavy commercial zones through the removal or screening of all rubbish, abandoned buildings, processing wastes, old equipment, or other forms of blight.
13. Consider changing the zoning ordinance to allow professional offices in the I-L zone at the Airport Industrial Park so that businesses will be encouraged to take advantage of the transportation opportunities at the airport.
14. To encourage the economic development of the City and to promote the goal of attracting quality industries, continue to improve the permit approval process to ensure equity and efficiency for industrial development projects. This should include review of application procedures as well as development of an up-to-date inventory of pertinent facts and information necessary to describe the services and facilities available in Merced.

B. HEAVY COMMERCIAL POLICIES

To recognize the importance and define the proper role of heavy commercial uses in the business economy of the community, the City establishes the following heavy commercial policies:

1. Investigate revisions to the Zoning Ordinance to define and control the establishment of land intensive heavy commercial uses as a distinct group of commercial enterprises which are important in the community but are not clearly a part of the industrial segment or the retail commercial segments of the economic environment. Uses to be allowed in the heavy commercial category should include for example lumberyards, mobile home sales, farm equipment sales, building supplies, auto wrecking yards, and heavy equipment repairs. Fabrication of materials for sale on the site is also a characteristic of the heavy commercial business, such as welding or sheet metal works.
2. A primary consideration in the regulation of heavy commercial uses is the designation of areas where these types of uses may locate. Two distinct types of districts should be created: one, where the lowest cost site is available with an inexpensive and not necessarily attractive building; and two, where well designed buildings and generous landscaping are appropriate. For example, along Childs Avenue west of Highway 99 would be an area suited for the lower design standards. The higher quality heavy commercial district standards should be applied in an area such as the south side of 16th Street in the downtown area and J Street south of Childs Avenue. The critical determinant should be the recognition of visual quality of the area and its importance in the overall appearance of the city.

3. It is important that the proposed design standards be coordinated with the County in the city's fringe area where many existing heavy commercial facilities have located in the past, and are in need of improvement to eliminate visual blight these uses often create at gateways or entrances to the city.
4. In some cases, consideration should be given to heavy commercial districts as a transition between industrial areas and other non-industrial or residential uses where it can be determined that such heavy commercial uses will not be a detriment to either the industrial or the adjacent residential uses.
5. The designation of heavy commercial areas on the General Plan and zoning maps, and the development of heavy commercial design guidelines should be used to assist in preserving existing and future industrial areas for strictly processing and manufacturing uses.

C. INDUSTRIAL AND HEAVY COMMERCIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

Note: Industrial and Heavy Commercial Design Guidelines are to be prepared as a follow-up to implement the General Plan after adoption. See also Chapter 8 - Urban Design.

COMMERCIAL AREAS

It is the intent of the General Plan to encourage the development of commercial areas which conveniently serve the residential population, provide employment opportunities, form an attractive segment of the community, and contribute to the community's tax base. The functional classification of commercial uses by the market they serve and the size and characteristics of their operations form the basis for the commercial segment of the General Plan. Including the heavy commercial uses previously discussed, the five categories of commercial land use should be viewed as a system. The distinct groupings summarized below will help to define the needs of both the consumer and the business community while giving clear meaning to the patterns of commercial uses in the city.

In a small community such as Merced, there is often an overlap in function among the commercial categories; therefore, the definitions should not be literally interpreted and a blending or mixture of categories may exist at any one time in a commercial district. The intent of these categories in the General Plan is to set goals for commercial development and to assist in the City's land use decision-making process. In order to use these categories in the decision-making process, a certain degree of flexibility is necessary to make the system work. The categories are useful in expressing the overall network of commercial services and employment which is needed in the community; although not all businesses will clearly fit into these categories, nor will all commercial land use situations be easily decided based on these General Plan designations. There will be cases where a commercial policy can only be achieved by strict enforcement and exclusion of some types of uses. In other cases, a mixture of commercial uses may be appropriate or even the

desired goal. Where clear lines of commercial function are an important goal with respect to a specific location or area of the community, there will be policies indicating these locations at the end of this chapter under Commercial Policies.

In almost all cases, the commercial designations on the General Plan Map and the related policies are directed at improvement of existing commercial areas of the city. In the 1968 General Plan, many of the land use designations were intended to eliminate whole commercial areas by designating residential uses where extensive commercial uses already existed. There are no such proposals in this General Plan. The designations and policies fall into several categories of action, depending on the specific location. This may include the reduction of some overdeveloped areas, the transition of some areas from an existing commercial function to some other role in the commercial system, or the expansion of commercial uses in other areas. Again, the major focus and need proposed in the commercial segment of this Plan will be to enhance existing commercial facilities. Future land use decisions should be directed towards more clearly defining the commercial uses and districts in the community, and improving their physical appearance through the use of the commercial land use categories and policies. The variety of categories proposed will meet the needs of the community and will not be overly restrictive on a community-wide basis.

COMMERCIAL LAND USE CATEGORIES

1. Thoroughfare Commercial Areas

The primary function of thoroughfare commercial areas is to accommodate auto-oriented commerce and the needs of people traveling on highways. These include motels, gas stations, truck stops and restaurants, establishments requiring large facilities or dealing with goods too large to be handled in other retail areas, (e.g., automobile sales, mobile home sales), and some commercial services. These latter uses may overlap some types of commercial facilities also mentioned in heavy commercial areas.

Thoroughfare commercial areas should be restricted to existing commercial areas along highways and arterials leading into and through the City. This category of commercial use is presently seen in the City's C-T (Thoroughfare Commercial) and C-G (General Commercial) districts as well as an abundance of general strip commercial areas in the County fringe areas. There is no need to expand the existing quantity of thoroughfare commercial areas during the planning period. The visual image created by these areas usually comprise the motorist's first and lasting impression of the city. These areas are often called "strip commercial" areas which, rightly so, often carry with it a number of negative connotations. Therefore, it will benefit the City to ensure that these areas attempt to project an image of well designed and maintained orderly development. While thoroughfare commercial areas contain a wide mixture of uses, some commercial uses are more appropriately located in other areas and should be discouraged or prohibited from locating along thoroughfares and gateways to the city. Inappropriate uses include neighborhood retail functions, professional

offices, and heavy commercial uses which cannot adequately screen objectionable storage area. Key design difficulties often attributed to these uses are excessive signs, poor or no landscaping, unscreened storage and loading areas, and disruptive vehicle access. The mixture of thoroughfare commercial uses often creates a disjointed hodge-podge appearance which has the compounding effect of making each new use compete for visual identity through larger signs or a flashier appearance. The restriction to just appropriate land uses and a more consistent design criteria enforced by the City would benefit both the business owner and the general appearance of the city.

To facilitate a coordinated design approach to improve several of the existing thoroughfare commercial areas, it is suggested that specific corridor plans be prepared and adopted by the City as a follow-up in implementing the General Plan. Areas which might be indicated for this special treatment include: 16th Street, Yosemite Park Way, J Street/South Highway 59, G Street, and West Olive Avenue.

2. Neighborhood and Convenience Centers

Neighborhood centers are designed to provide for the sale of convenience goods (foods, drugs, and sundries) and personal services, those which meet the daily needs of an immediate neighborhood trade area. A supermarket is usually the principal tenant in the neighborhood center, or may share the major tenant function with a super-drug store. Geographical convenience is the most important factor in the shopper's choice of facility to frequent in this commercial category. Several "rules of thumb" are frequently used to describe the appropriate market area or draw for neighborhood centers, such as a residential population of 2,500 to 5,000 persons, within a reasonable walking distance, or within a one-half mile to a mile radius.

The variety of goods and services offered is usually quite similar between neighborhood centers, unless more than one center is allowed to locate within the same drawing area. If this occurs, the competition for floor space may begin to attract other uses, such as home furnishings, clothing sales, and business services. At this point, the facilities begin to take on a community center function for which they may be improperly located or designed to handle. In addition, the "strip commercial" effect can be caused by multiple neighborhood centers located in close proximity along major thoroughfares. This dilemma can be seen in the area of G Street and Olive Avenue. Often, it would be more appropriate for the non-neighborhood center uses (such as appliance, clothing, or home furnishing sales) to locate in the central business district, or a community/regional center, thereby lessening the impact on the adjacent residential areas and the traffic load on major streets.

In addition to the standard neighborhood center, there is also the possibility of creating a designation for convenience centers. This type of facility could locate on a small site of one-half to two acres and serve the immediate residential neighborhood. The

major tenant would be a shop-and-go type food store with maybe one or two other tenants providing personal services. This might be considered the modern version of the "mom-and-pop_" grocery store. At this time, the chain-type outfit marketing this kind of business usually prefers to locate on major thoroughfares in the vicinity of other larger commercial facilities, and not independently in residential neighborhoods. It is a worthwhile concept, though, which the City should follow up with possible zoning modifications to accommodate this type of facility if the opportunity arises.

Both the neighborhood center and the proposed convenience center are directly related to the residential neighborhoods in which they are located. Because of this, the City should place a great deal of emphasis on the general design and appearance of these facilities. To lessen this impact, the following design features should be applied to this category of commercial use:

- a. Heavily landscaped parking areas, including shade trees.
- b. Landscape buffer several feet in width around the entire perimeter of the shopping center.
- c. Loading and garbage collection facilities should be completely screened from public view.
- d. Lighting should not cause glare onto adjacent residential property.
- e. Signs should be limited to a reasonable size to identify the center and not be aimed at competing for visual attention.
- f. Traffic circulation should provide access onto major streets and not onto minor residential streets.
- g. Architecture should attempt to be harmonious with adjacent residential areas reflecting a sensitivity for the character of the neighborhood.

3. Community and Regional Centers

Often cities define two distinct categories of major retail centers, community centers and regional centers. Because of Merced's present population and size, these two categories are grouped together. The major retail centers in Merced serve the community and attract customers from a wider regional market. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Merced captures over 50 percent of the retail sales for the entire county and clearly acts as the primary retail center of the county. This is an important part of the city's economy and should be continued through the planning period.

There are three areas in the city which fit into the community and regional commercial category: the Merced Mall area, the Westgate area, and the downtown. Development of a fourth area should be encouraged in the south or southeast portion of Merced. The downtown area or central business district will be discussed as a

separate section in this chapter because of its unique features, its importance to the economic environment of the City, and the downtown redevelopment project. The community and regional centers are distinguished from the downtown area because they are generally architecturally unified facilities built on a single site or a combination of adjacent large sites, usually managed as a single operating unit with on-site parking provided in direct relationship to the size and design of the facility. The definitive feature for a community or regional center is major tenant classification and the amount of auxiliary facilities. A community center has a junior department store and/or variety store as the major tenant or combination of major tenants. The regional center provides shopping goods, general merchandise, apparel, and home furnishings in full depth and variety, with one or more major department stores as the key tenants. The regional center will also have a proportionately larger pedestrian area and more expansive parking. These two types of facilities do not function in any distinguishably different roles in the economy and are only defined separately by size and character of the key tenants. In Merced, the Westgate Shopping Center could be defined as a community center and Merced Mall as a regional center.

There are no new community or regional centers designated on the General Plan Map at this time. This is the result of a combination of factors including population projections, the amount of sales potential in the existing centers, and vacant or developable land in the vicinity of the existing centers. The General Plan does not attempt to present a complete market analysis to justify this position. When a new community or regional center is proposed in the community, it should be required that the applicant demonstrate, through an accepted market analysis, that there is a clear need for such a facility, and that a completely new facility would not merely draw substantial amounts of sales away from existing stores to the detriment of the city as a whole.

Although it has been suggested that a specific site should be labeled as a reserve area for a future regional or community center, this option has not been carried out because of the inability to predict exactly what the proper location should be at this time. It is not felt that it is as important to reserve space for a completely new regional site somewhere on the City's fringe area as is the case for industrial areas, which are far more land intensive, need rail and highway access, and generate more environmental hazards. Basically, a major commercial center will follow the market and the site location will be defined by the key tenant who can be found at the time. These unknown factors would not benefit from designating a specific site on the General Plan as a reserve for a new regional commercial center. It is also felt that the primary goal during the coming planning period should be the enhancement and stabilization of the City's existing facilities. The designation of a new site may cause a lessening of faith in the City's commitment to this goal.

4. Central Business District

Like most older communities, Merced's central business district was once the center of retail and business activity for the entire community. The decline of this commercial area is a serious General Plan issue and a problem which the City is deeply committed to changing through the long-range goals and action strategies incorporated in the City's Redevelopment Project No. 2, adopted in 1974.

To support the City's downtown revitalization efforts, the General Plan must look at the land use and economic questions related to this project and attempt to assist and support these goals. Several causes of the downtown's shift from being the dominant retail center of the community can be identified. The first thing to remember about all downtown areas is that they have always been in transition - changing - and will continue to do so regardless of whether the change is for the better or for the worse. Downtowns do not share the immense advantage enjoyed by regional suburban malls - coordinated leasing and marketing, standards for signs and architecture, common hours and specialized maintenance for trash collection, parking, landscaping, and physical security.

Dealing with many different merchants, property owners, lease agreements, and property divisions is not easy. From an economic standpoint of the retail businesses in the downtown, the problem is simply one of flight to the outlying suburban mall to take advantage of better location and increased sales. This migration tends to compound itself as the exodus from the downtown continues and more merchants are encouraged to follow. For those who stay, the declining area often becomes an embarrassment accompanied by financial losses that can only be recouped by eventually moving to the prime locations in North Merced.

In addition to the competitive draw caused by Merced Mall, the 1968 General Plan pointed out the self-defeating nature of the existing zoning in the downtown area by stating:

"For the foreseeable future, commercially zoned land is grossly in excess of need. The result of this unwise zoning is a spotty strip of mixed and unrelated uses. Now unattractive for residential uses, 17th and 18th Streets have not been able to develop into productive commercial streets for much of their length. Within the adjoining residential area to the north, there appears to be a tendency to neglect or defer maintenance in expectation of a change in use and the chance of a speculative profit. Thus, the effect of the commercial over-zoning has not been restricted to the area zoned, but has exerted a negative effect on adjacent blocks as well." (1968 General Plan, page 38)

The above described secondary decline of adjacent residential areas can also be documented in the gradual lowering in the economic levels of the persons surrounding the central business district. This not only reduces total sales for existing merchants in the downtown area, but it also makes it difficult to attract new major

retail outlets to the downtown area. A concerted effort should be made by the City to maintain and improve the residential character and livability of the neighborhoods around the core area if revitalization is going to be successful. The General Plan should reflect the City's commitment to these residential areas as strongly as it has to the business sector in the central business district.

The role of the central business district should continue to be one of providing jobs, providing a tax base, and acting as a primary focal point for the City. A continued strong commitment to the central business district by the City can provide the opportunity to bring about an orderly and aesthetic gathering of commercial, civic, and cultural facilities, thereby creating a distinctive and meaningful structure for the downtown. This will take a concerted effort by both public and private sectors of the community, including recognition of counter-productive zoning and capital improvements in North Merced which perpetuate deterioration of the downtown area.

In 1975, the Gruen Associates, a planning consulting firm, evaluated the options and opportunities for Merced's downtown. The four options presented were:

1. Creation of a new major retail center in the downtown.
2. Elimination of the downtown as a central business district and reuse of the area for housing and industry.
3. Holding actions maintaining existing levels of downtown activities until market potential for additional major retail outlets is developed again.
4. Remedial actions leading to partial revitalization of downtown with emphasis on special functions such as financial district, automotive sales, agricultural equipment center, community level shopping facilities, a tourist center, etc.

The City is presently placing emphasis on portions of both the holding actions and remedial actions options outlined above. The intent of these action strategies are generally consistent with the goals of the General Plan and are summarized below:

Holding Action Strategy. This strategy envisions a long-term holding action which would eventually enable a major new downtown commercial center to be implemented when market support once again becomes available. Actions suggested are the construction of a civic/cultural center, attraction of financial and office facilities and prudent purchases of land. These uses and land purchases would be placed so that they could contribute to the long-range re-creation of a new commercial center in the downtown.

Remedial Action Strategy. This approach envisions the creation of maximum rehabilitation and revitalization opportunities if all major retailers (department stores) leave downtown. The key to

this plan is to build upon the strength of the Westgate Center to attempt to keep as much retailing activity as possible in relatively close proximity to the downtown. It also calls for programs to retain existing offices and financial institutions and the development of multi-family residential projects in the northeast and northwest sections of the project area."

5. Commercial and Professional Office

The fifth category of commercial use is commercial and professional office. As a land use category, commercial and professional office functions in a variety of locations in the City. In some cases, they will tend to congregate, as a result of the immediate surroundings, as seen around the County Courthouse and County Administration Building. In other situations, commercial and professional offices are grouped by zoning restrictions or in the desire to locate in planned office complexes. In the downtown area, offices and financial institutions are an integral element in maintaining the viability of the central business district as an economic center for the city and county.

Therefore, commercial offices should be encouraged to locate in the central business district whenever possible. Since office space in other parts of the city competes with downtown office uses, new office projects should be evaluated in terms of their effect on downtown commercial office space and the redevelopment project. In addition, every effort should be made to maintain existing commercial office uses in the downtown.

COMMERCIAL POLICIES

1. The City should continue to show a commitment to the economic growth of the City through provision for all categories of commercial development in the City.
2. Future commercial development in the City should first use the City's existing major commercial locations, the Westgate area, and the Merced Mall area. No new community or regional commercial centers should be designated or zoned without proof of the economic necessity for such facilities and clear demonstration that such facilities would not create unreasonable economic impacts on the existing economic environment of the city. The burden of proof in such cases should be the responsibility of the applicant.
3. Neighborhood commercial centers should be provided for in proportion to residential expansion in the City. Such facilities should be adequately spaced throughout the City to ensure that they retain their function of providing personal goods and services to the immediate neighborhood, and do not become "strip commercial" areas or community centers because of being located too closely together.
4. Special emphasis should be placed on encouragement of a neighborhood commercial center somewhere in the vicinity of Childs Avenue and South Highway 59 to serve the needs of South Merced residents and proposed residential development south of Childs Avenue.

5. A major emphasis in commercial land use decisions by the City during the next planning period should be directed toward the enhancement and improvement of existing commercial facilities, and the efficient development of existing commercially zoned areas in the City.
6. Continue to evaluate and redefine the role between the existing regional shopping center areas in North Merced and the downtown/ Westgate area with respect to appropriate commercial development for each.
7. Encourage the development of an appropriate motel/convention facility in the downtown core area in scale and design with the redevelopment project.
8. Commercial and professional office uses should be considered as conditional uses in the I-L zone at Merced Municipal Airport to provide the necessary facilities for executive or business offices which are oriented to air travel.
9. Evaluate the Zoning Ordinance to consider eliminating restrictive sections in the C-C (Central Commercial) zone which might deter revitalization or appropriate development in the central business district, such as height limits, setbacks, or parking requirements. In addition, continue the design review process within the redevelopment area and also consider the adoption of a historic preservation overlay zone within the central business district.
10. In implementing the General Plan, proceed with preparation and adoption of specific plans (corridor plans) for the improvement of strip commercial and gateway areas to the City and county fringes. Such plans should outline methods of enhancement to include land use, signs, architecture, landscaping, street trees, public improvements, billboards, blight, screening of storage areas, and other related design guidelines.
11. In order to encourage the development of economic environment in the City and to enhance Merced's position as the retail center of the region, attempt to improve the local permit approval process to ensure equity and efficiency for all land use applications. Special emphasis should be placed on continued efforts to promote cooperation with the County and standardization of development standards between the City and County.
12. Create and maintain adequate off-street parking, and particularly major arterial traffic access from North Merced to the downtown improvement area in order to insure continued growth of the downtown and central business areas. Wherever possible, public facilities should be located near the downtown area and central business district as additional incentives for the economic revitalization of the area.
13. Review the sign ordinance for the area south of Bear Creek.
14. Develop a corridor plan for G Street, particularly between 16th and South Bear Creek.

chapter six



TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

Introduction

Streets and Highways

Public Transit

Bicycle Transportation Plan

Pedestrians

CHAPTER 6 TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

INTRODUCTION

The basic issue of this chapter is how to move people and goods in the best manner. This depends on time, cost, convenience, safety, energy consumption, noise generation, and combinations of these factors. Circulation and transportation solutions will also correlate with present and future trends in population, technological change, land use constraints, public attitudes, fiscal ability, and jurisdictional authority. A comprehensive short-term and long-term circulation plan must reflect the reality of these factors.

The City is served by several different transportation systems including streets and highways, railroads, air carriers, and bicycles and pedestrian routes. The transportation modes in a community and region both complement and compete with one another. The Circulation Element of the General Plan will help to resolve the difficult policy decisions which must be made in choosing among the various modes of transportation. These decisions will involve the weighing of such factors as economy, efficiency, environmental protection, and energy consumption. Many of these factors can be directly influenced at the local level, while with others, the final authority lies outside the scope of local government.

During the next planning period, the primary transportation consideration will be automobile dependency. To a great extent, this will depend on policies of the federal and state government, as well as private enterprise. It is not likely that there will be a massive shift to public transportation in the nation or state and especially not in a relatively rural setting like Merced. The changes to alternate modes of transportation are going to be gradual. The circulation policies should recognize and accommodate methods which will reduce auto dependency, although it would be unrealistic to disregard the fact that the use of the automobile is presently an integral part of American life and the national economy.

Two major issues of national and local importance are related to this auto dependency: air pollution and energy consumption. At the local level, these issues can be affected by two methods:

1. Reduce the number of vehicles miles traveled by altering the location and relationships of land uses.
2. Control energy consumption and/or air pollution by direct control of specific land use.

The policies of the Circulation Element address these issues while outlining a system designed to achieve the overall economic, social, and physical goals of the General Plan. In other words, the circulation system is not planned solely on the basis of transportation criteria. Other criteria may support a better physical design. For example, an efficient street system can have beneficial effects on air quality and require less energy and materials to construct. The proper spacing of thoroughfares, traffic signal intervals, and other components of the

street system may result in less stop and go traffic and, therefore, less air pollution and energy consumption.

Circulation is one of the major physical elements of the community and, as such, a well planned circulation system is vital to the growth and development of the community. Development of all modes of transportation can lead to more efficient use of land within the urban expansion area. This, in turn, can create the opportunity for both economic development as well as viable residential neighborhoods.

STREETS AND HIGHWAYS

A. FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

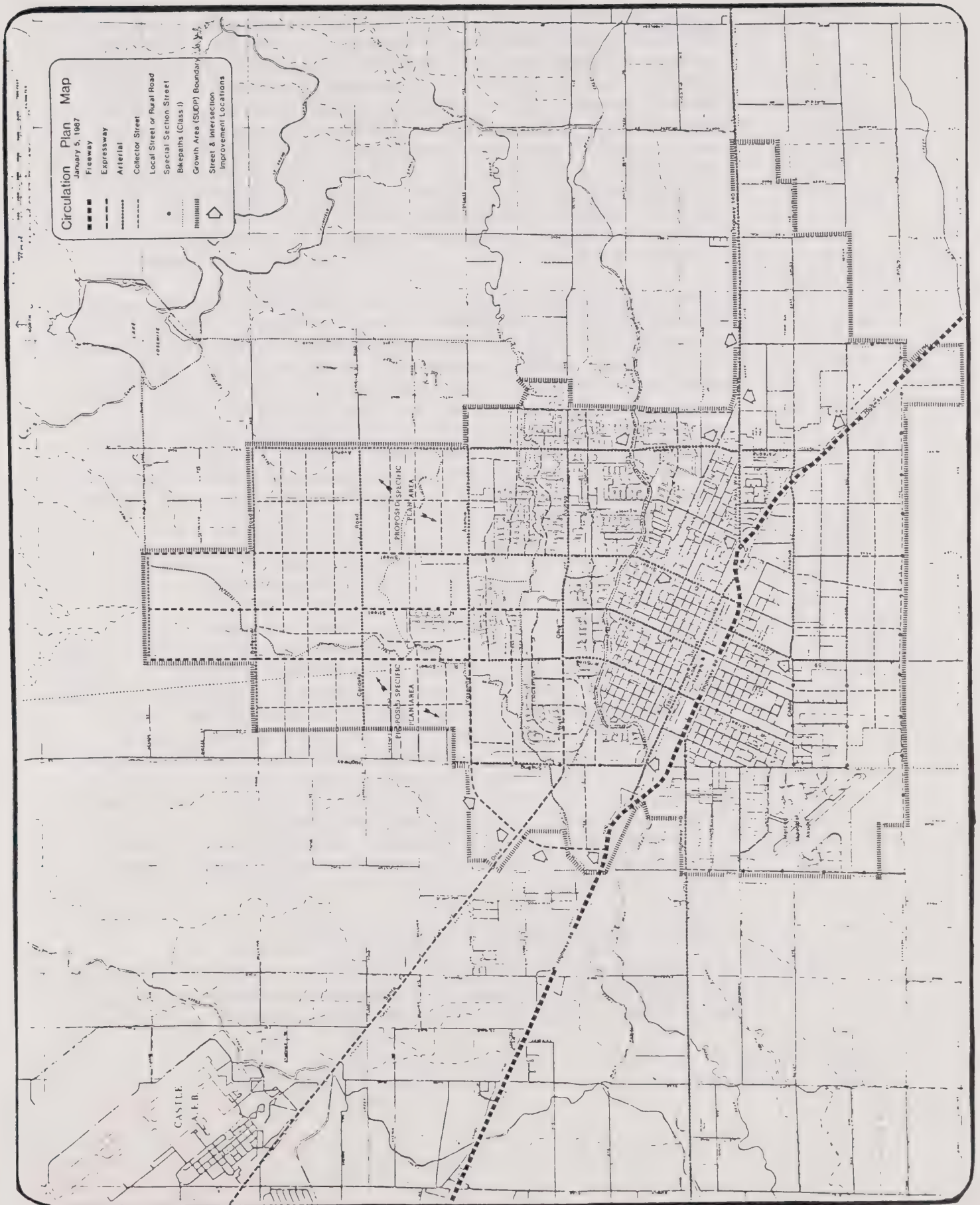
Functional classification categorizes each existing street or proposed street according to its primary function. This creates a hierarchal system as the basis for establishing standards, designing streets, selecting necessary traffic control measures, establishing a priority for construction and measuring the quality of movement. In many cases, this system will also define appropriate land uses, the intensity of development, and the location of public facilities. This classification system is based on functional categories used by county, regional, state, and federal agencies. This complementary system of identification not only allows for inter-agency cooperation, but is often required to qualify for grants and entitlements benefitting the City. (See also the Functional Usage and Federal Aid System Map, in the Statistical Appendix.)

The functional classification of streets and highways rests on the following concepts:

1. Streets and highways are classified into separate and distinct systems in accordance with their intended primary circulation purpose. Each system serves the movement of traffic and the access to property to a different degree.
2. Street classification governs design standards and construction and improvement priorities.
3. The City's circulation system must be coordinated with the networks of the state and county.
4. All major streets and highways have continuity, logical termini, and adequate capacity to allow and provide a high quality of flow.

The functional classification system to be used in the Circulation Element and the land use and circulation maps (see Figure 6-A) divide all streets and highways into the following categories:

Figure 6-A



Freeways: Freeways are major routes designed to carry large traffic volumes over long distances. Access is controlled, and grade separations and median strips are used to separate lanes of traffic moving in different directions. Through Merced, Route 99 is a four-lane freeway, elevated from about the crossing of Bear Creek on the west through the central part of the city to the intersection of Childs Avenue in the southeast area of the city. Its capacity for average daily traffic (ADT) is approximately 55,000 to 60,000 vehicles. Route 99's role is inter-regional in character, carrying both the traveling public and serving as a vital commercial link carrying goods and produce both to and from the community.

Expressways: Expressways are roads designed to carry heavy traffic volumes at moderate speeds. Access is controlled, crossings are at grade, intersections are generally every mile and there are medians between lanes traveling in opposite directions. The basic right-of-way is typically 128 feet. Access to abutting properties is restricted to internal streets or frontage roads. Parking is prohibited. Capacity varies depending upon lane width, lateral clearance, and distance between intersections. Expressways should be heavily landscaped to give them a parkway type character and identify their function to the driver.

Presently, parts of Olive Avenue, M Street, G Street and R Street, are designed and function as expressways.

Arterial Streets: Arterial streets are designed to carry heavy traffic volumes at lower speeds than expressways. Some arterial streets have medians to control cross traffic. The main function of arterials is to accommodate intra-city trips and other medium distance movements, providing the basic transportation links between various land uses and major destinations in the city. Separate turning lanes are usually provided and signals control major intersections. Curb cuts for driveways are located away from intersections and limited to only essential access points. Restrictions may be placed on entering and exiting. Curbside parking is not allowed in most cases. Turnouts for transit stops should be considered. Arterials should have a right-of-way of at least 94 feet wide. Landscaping and lighting should be designed to emphasize and identify the importance of the street.

Collector Streets: Collector streets are designed to channel traffic from local streets into the major street system and to handle short trips within neighborhoods. They distribute and

collect traffic which is generated in the area circumscribed by major streets. They provide for movement within industrial, commercial and residential areas, or for connecting adjacent land uses. Speeds are generally low due to pedestrian activity and the frequent access to abutting land uses. Collectors normally have just two lanes of traffic with right-of-ways up to 74 feet (except larger where a median strip is included). Parking may be prohibited in selected areas where the pavement width is needed for traffic capacity. Examples of existing collector streets include Loughborough Drive, East Alexander Avenue, or East 21st Street.

Local Streets: Local streets primarily provide access to destinations within residential neighborhoods or business districts. Local streets include local through streets, local cul-de-sacs, and alleys. In residential areas, these are the streets upon which houses front. Therefore, it is important to eliminate through traffic to a maximum degree by using cul-de-sacs, looped streets, and T-intersections. They should be designed to carry no more traffic than is required to serve the abutting land uses at low speed travel and usually permit parking on at least one side.

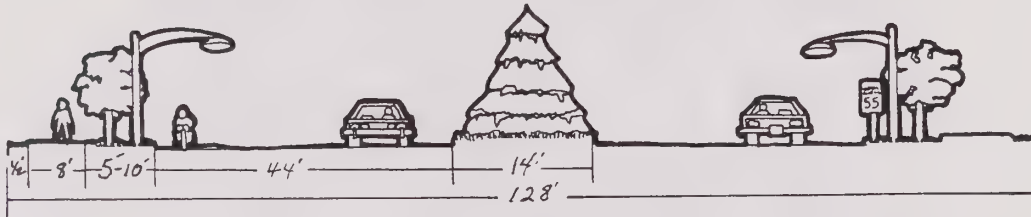
Rural Roads: Rural roads may be major or collector streets, depending upon their traffic carrying requirements, adjacent land use, or special circumstances. Separate turning lanes, passing lanes, curbs, gutters, and sidewalks are included only where necessary or planned for future urbanization. Design details may vary, but this type of road should reflect consideration of an existing rural environment and the future development of the area. Rural roads are important in integrating the County road system with the City's urban expansion area. The key in determining the use of this road design is the expected time of development and the type of development proposed. A fundamental principle in the circulation system is to have major city streets drop down in size and capacity to a rural road classification as they extend out to rural residential buffer zones and permanent agricultural areas. This type of road will also be found in unincorporated areas of the urban expansion area where development is not likely to occur for several years (see Figure 6-A).

Special Arterial, Collector, or Local Streets: These are special streets which do not use normal design sections. These streets are designated where conditions warrant special designs, such as absence of curb and gutter adjacent to permanent agricultural areas, insufficient right-of-way, state highway needs, physical boundaries, or older existing neighborhoods. Variations in right-of-way width, curb-to-curb width, requirement of improvements, etc., may be permitted for these special streets.

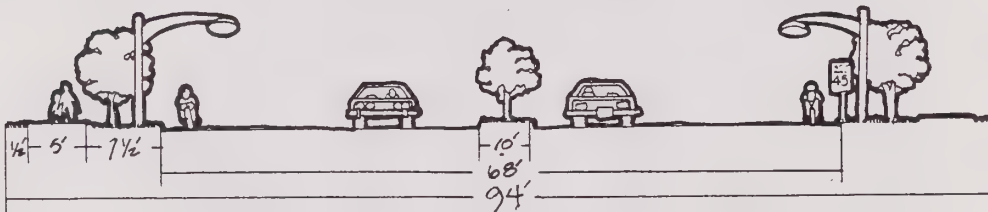
Figure 6-B

REPRESENTATIVE STREET SECTIONS

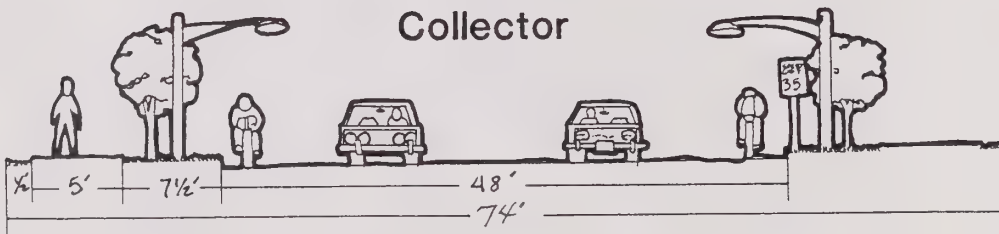
Expressway*



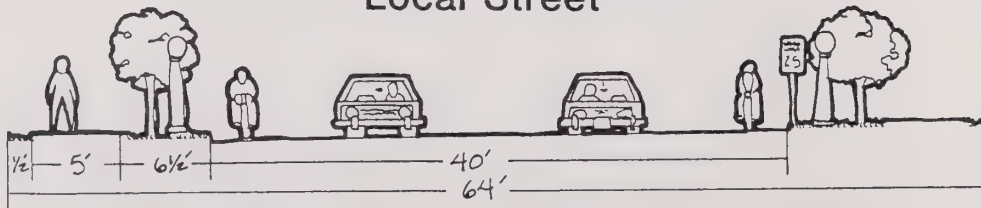
Arterial*



Collector



Local Street



* Expressway is synonymous with "Divided Arterial" in the City Design Standards. The Expressway parkstrip varies from 5'-10'.

* The Arterial Median is optional and width can vary.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. General Recommendations:

The streets and highways circulation plan is an extension of both the 1968 General Plan proposal and the Long-Range Street Right-of-Way Plan adopted by the City Council in August, 1978. While the functional classification system remains basically unchanged, the underlying principles of the 1968 plan have been changed. The major concept of the 1968 circulation plan was to develop a system of peripheral major streets and highways surrounding the City. This entailed major highway improvements, including right-of-way acquisition, and construction of miles of roadway and highway interchanges. In addition to the excessive costs and lack of vehicles to warrant this construction, major elements of the proposal were outside the City's jurisdiction, including State Highway 59 (north and south) and State Highway 140.

The current street and highway circulation plan relies more heavily on improvement of existing right-of-ways and the development of a system based on the County's grid network of rural roads. The primary elements in the plan are as follows:

Major east/west streets:	Cardella Road
	Yosemite Avenue
	Olive Avenue
	16th Street
	Yosemite Park Way
	(State Highway 140)
	Childs Avenue

Major north/south streets:	Parsons Avenue
	G Street
	M Street
	R Street
	Highway 59

2. Examples or Illustrative Recommendations:

- a. The Bradley Overpass should be upgraded to improve safety and accommodate future traffic flows to the eastern industrial area and intra-regional travel to destinations in Mariposa County and Yosemite National Park.
- b. Grade separations should be encouraged between streets and railroad tracks wherever feasible.
- c. Investigate the use of narrower streets for residential streets.
- d. The use of alleys in new residential development should be discouraged due to added costs of construction and maintenance.

- e. The following intersection should be studied and action taken to improve safety and circulation:

-Highway 99 at Gerard Avenue

- f. Pursue traffic signal equipment update on the existing traffic signal system.
- g. A Highway 99 full interchange at G Street.
- h. The extension of G Street south to Gerard Avenue at the same width as the rest of G Street (80 feet right-of-way width).
- i. Designate future Bear Creek bridges where needed to serve traffic.
- j. Study 26th Street from M Street to Glen Avenue.
- k. Extend Yosemite Avenue from Santa Fe Drive to connect with Highway 99.
- l. Others, in accordance with the Traffic Committee recommendation.

STREETS AND HIGHWAYS POLICIES

To provide a balanced, comprehensive transportation and circulation system coordinated with land use that adequately accommodates the total travel needs of the community, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Ensure that the existing and proposed circulation systems accommodate the many traffic functions they are intended to serve with a minimum adverse impact on the environment in the planning area. Coordinate all circulation systems to maximize safety and efficiency and minimize conflicts.
2. Implement the circulation system proposed whereby the design of each street is consistent with the character and use of adjacent land or the transportation function of street, and the function of the street is readily identifiable through consistent hierarchy of street design.
3. Closely coordinate the review and updating of the major street systems with county, regional, and state agencies.
4. Land use proposals shall continue to be approved subject to meeting the requirements necessary to implement the circulation plan.
5. Use the street classification system to cost effectively design and integrate all modes of transportation that use the street system, including pedestrian, bicycle, and transit.

6. Wherever economically feasible, or wherever made possible by approval of development proposals, designate and reserve adequate rights-of-way to meet anticipated traffic volumes to be consistent with the street classification system, and to provide for the needs of traffic safety.
7. Locate and design major streets in such a manner as to complement the residential neighborhoods, business centers and other homogeneous areas served, to minimize related aesthetic problems, and to maximize the possible use of solar energy techniques.
8. Promote and use methods for minimizing noise and air pollution associated with heavily traveled traffic corridors.
9. Develop and require better landscaping, beautification, and maintenance standards for all streets and freeways as outlined in the street classification system.
10. Improve the appearance and traffic flow of all new major streets by the use of median strips and the exclusion of unnecessary on-street parking; improve the appearance of existing major streets through the construction of planned median strips whenever feasible.
11. Design and improve streets to minimize impacts on residential neighborhoods and other adjacent land uses.
12. Design standards and proposed improvements to existing streets shall be consistent with the goals and policies of the Scenic Highways and Open Space Elements of the General Plan.
13. Promote increased traffic safety with special attention to hazards which could cause personal injury.
14. Every effort should be made to eliminate unnecessary cross-traffic and curb cuts, and to improve traffic flow along major streets and expressways.
15. Continue to identify, in accordance with State warrant procedures, intersections which are congested and make the necessary provision to improve intersections before they become significant safety hazards.
16. Minimize the impacts of major thoroughfares on adjacent residential neighborhoods.
17. Intersections on other than expressways should be spaced to provide for future synchronization of signals (recommended spacing for these intersections is one-quarter mile). Expressway spacing should be one mile or more.
18. Make a stronger commitment to increase the number of people per vehicle so that the existing street system is utilized to its fullest (e.g., car pools).

19. Reduce street capacities as they extend out from the center of the city towards the eastern and western SUDP boundaries, consistent with expected traffic flows in the service areas.

TRANSIT

The city is presently served by a variety of transit services, yet most show some room for improvement and there is very little coordination between the systems. Public transportation provided in the City includes local services such as the City's Merced Transit System, private taxis, and inter-regional services such as private bus firms, AMTRAK, and limited air passenger carriers. This assortment of public transportation opportunities will provide a good base for expansion of all these services as the city continues to grow. Public transit will help to meet the transportation needs of the community's population without auto access or possibly restrained by age or physical handicap. It will also greatly improve the chances to achieve the goals of efficiency and energy conservation by offering alternatives to a totally auto dependent transportation system. The need to coordinate and improve the public transit systems serving Merced are going to become increasingly important as public attitudes toward mass transit become more favorable.

In 1974, the Merced Transit System was created using 4 modified vans providing a demand responsive dial-a-ride service within the city limits of Merced. The primary goal of this program was to serve the senior citizens, the economically disadvantaged and the handicapped. During the first years of the dial-a-ride program, periodic surveys of ridership characteristics were kept to evaluate the system's ability to meet this goal and to consider the possibilities of expanding the system. By 1980, the system enlarged to a fleet of 8 buses, with a permanent dispatch and maintenance facility located at the City's Corporation Yard. Funding for Merced Transit System has come in the past and is projected to continue from three major sources:

1. Urban Mass Transportation Authority (UMTA) - a Federal source of revenue used for capital improvement and operating budget.
2. SB325 - State of California Gas Tax Funds, available for use in the operating budget.
3. SB620 - State Transportation Funding, a special revenue source for transit uses only available for special requirements in support of capital improvements.

Ridership has continued to increase on the system with the use of both fixed route and demand/response operations. In order to provide the most efficient service in terms of both rider needs and cost effective delivery, it is likely that this combination or hybrid of fixed route and demand/response service will be best suited for Merced in the near future.

With regard to public transit, there are two primary goals. One is to encourage and promote the development of all the existing public transit systems now serving the community. The other goal is to better coordinate and centralize the existing services to make public transit

easier and more acceptable to a larger segment of the population. Although many of the systems are run by private enterprise or are otherwise outside the City's jurisdiction, it would be in the City's best interest to promote the development of a centralized public transit terminal. This terminal could provide well maintained and clean facilities for the transit user and house the operations from both private and public transportation systems, including railroad passenger service, bus service, and taxi service.

One specific location consistently nominated for this type of facility is the old Southern Pacific Railroad Depot on 16th Street at N Street. This possibility would fit well into the downtown revitalization efforts and is located on a scenic corridor leading to the Courthouse Square, thereby giving a good impression of the community to the traveling public. The preservation of this historic site and building would also be a tremendous asset to the community. In addition, the site is centrally located on a major street and close to freeway access.

TRANSIT POLICIES

In order to develop and maintain a public transit system which is responsive to the needs of the community and to actively promote these systems to lessen the community's dependence on the automobile, the City establishes the following public transit policies:

A. PUBLIC TRANSIT POLICIES

1. Continue to pursue the development of the Southern Pacific Depot located at 16th and N Streets as a "Transpo-Station" -- a multi-use transportation center, combining both private and public transit.
2. Continue to seek federal, state, and other funding sources which provide major funding for transit equipment, maintenance and operation. Support legislation which will provide additional funding.
3. Continue to review routes, scheduling and vehicle operations of Merced Transit System with the aim of increasing transit patronage and improving the level of service.
4. Continue to evaluate and recommend land use proposals and site design criteria which will support and enhance the use of public transit within the overall circulation system.
5. Major streets should have turnouts for transit stops.

B. AIRPORT POLICIES

1. Promote and encourage the orderly and timely development of both commercial and general aviation facilities through active implementation of the Merced Municipal Airport Master Plan.

2. Provide adequate ground transportation systems that complement air transportation facilities.
3. Restrict land uses and acquire property where necessary for the protection of approach areas and control zones for both existing and future runway systems for maximum community safety and to provide the necessary opportunities for future airport expansion.

C. RAILROAD POLICIES

1. Encourage retention and promotion of railroad passenger service for Merced.
2. Encourage the possibility of combining the AT&SF and Southern Pacific Railroads onto one route through the City, using the existing Southern Pacific Railroad route parallel to Highway 99.
3. Encourage the retention and addition of railroad tracks necessary to promote and retain industrial land uses.
4. Request that railroad car switching on the Santa Fe tracks be minimized or eliminated between Glen Avenue and R Street at peak traffic times, and that the at-grade railroad crossings through town be improved and better maintained to increase traffic flow and decrease inconvenience to motorists.

BICYCLE TRANSPORTATION

In the future, bicycles could constitute an important mode of transportation in the community and reduce dependence on the automobile. Merced has both a favorable climate and terrain to encourage the use of bicycles for both recreational and transportation functions. As the use of bicycles increases, adequate facilities must be provided to furnish direct routes of access between destinations while minimizing conflicts with automobiles and the risk of serious accident.

Bicycle facilities are categorized by the degree which they separate bicycle movement from traffic flow of automobiles. The Bicycle Transportation Plan (see Figure 6-C) incorporated into the circulation plan is based on the State Department of Transportation classification system. Two major types of bikeways will primarily be used: 1) off-street bikeways, and 2) on-street bikeways. Off-street bikeways are intended to be Class I (Bike Paths or Bike Trails) whenever possible. Class I bike paths provide a completely separated right-of-way designated for the exclusive use of bicycles and pedestrians with cross flows by motorists minimized. In Merced, these Class I bike paths generally take advantage of creekside locations and other non-street facilities, such as canals or railroad corridors. Although the off-street bikeways provide extensive recreational opportunities, the primary focus is on safe and efficient transportation linking major land uses and connecting with on-street bikeways at strategic locations. The off-street bike paths are also consistent with the goals and policies of the Open Space and Conservation Elements of the General Plan.

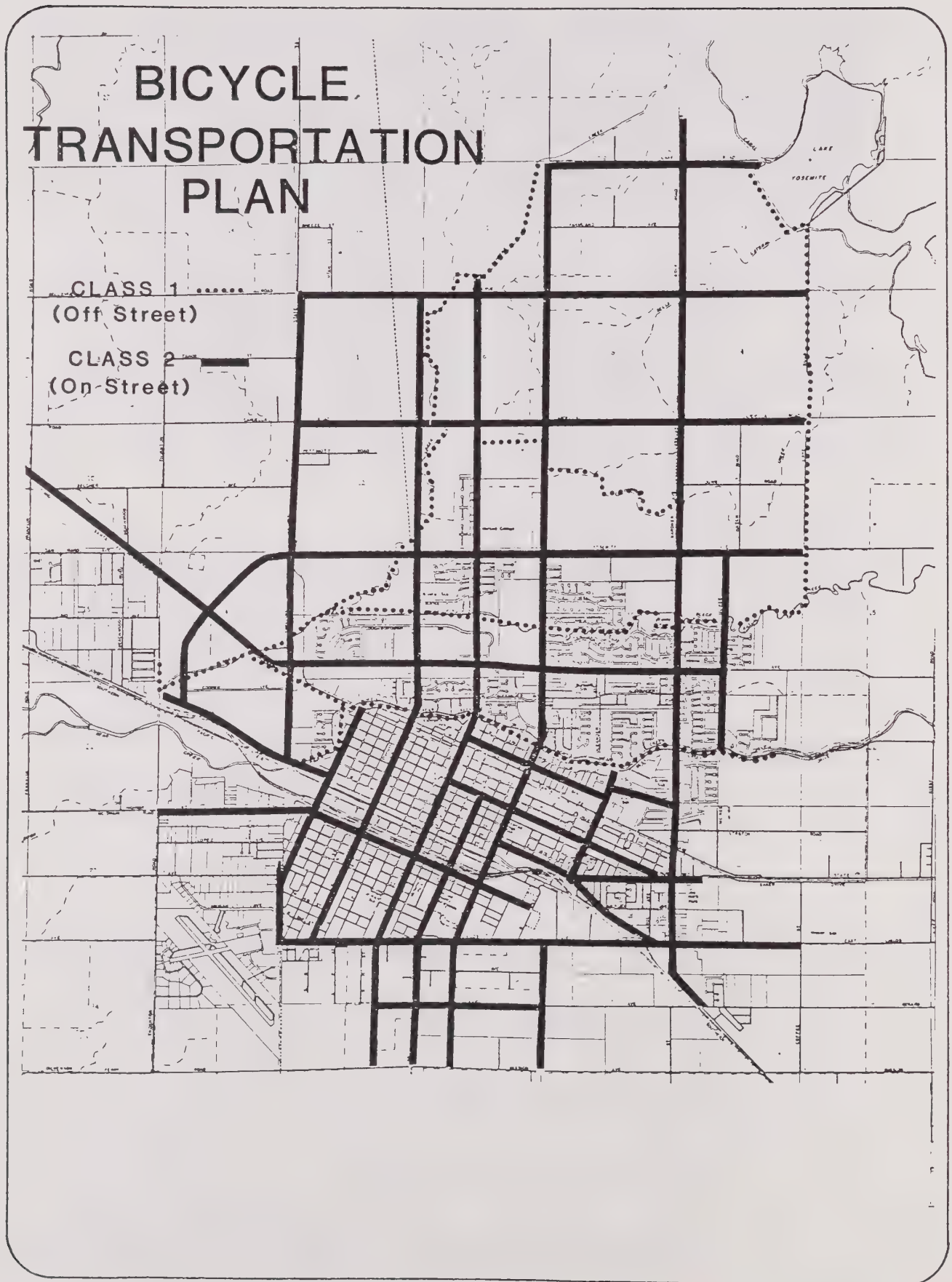
The on-street bikeways are intended to be Class II (Bike Lanes) whenever possible. Class II bike lanes provide a restricted right-of-way on the street designated for the exclusive or semi-exclusive use of bicycles with through travel by motor vehicles or pedestrians prohibited, but with cross flows by pedestrians and motorists permitted. The on-street system may use Class III (Bike Route) designations occasionally where Class II bike lanes are not feasible. Class III bike routes provide a right-of-way generally designated by signs and shared with pedestrians or motorists. Class III bike routes are to be avoided if possible and used only to temporarily connect or continue Class I or II facilities for short distances. While the signing of secondary streets as "bike routes" demonstrates civic interest, these bike routes will not be heavily traveled unless they happen to coincide with routes of direct access. Since bicyclists rely on their own motive power, they will avoid routes which are out of their way to reach a destination just as motorists will, except for recreational cycling. A system of bicycle facilities which designates indirect routes will serve little purpose. On-street bikeways will generally follow all existing or proposed major streets which provide the quickest, shortest, and safest route to take for bicyclists as well as motorists.

BICYCLE TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

In order to establish and implement a comprehensive bikeway plan for the city which serves both utilitarian and recreational needs of the residents, which provides, where possible, separate access to major destinations and assures safety for all, the City establishes the following bicycle transportation policies as an integral part of the overall Circulation Element of the General Plan:

- ①. Promote the use of bicycles by formulating incentive measures for City employees who commute on bicycles.
2. Encourage other governmental agencies to promote bicycle use using incentive programs or other means.
3. Encourage private businesses to promote bicycle use for employees and customers.
4. Provide adequate support facilities (e.g., bicycle parking, secure locking devices, etc.) through ordinance requirements.
5. Coordinate implementation of the Bicycle Transportation Plan with the County of Merced.
6. Pursue all possible revenue sources available for implementing the Bicycle Transportation Plan.
7. The following design criteria shall be used in the development of all bike facilities in Merced:
 - a. Class I, II, and III bikeways shall be designed in accordance with the State of California "Planning and Design Criteria for Bikeways in California."

Figure 6-C



- b. Class I bikeways are to have grade separation with all major streets where possible.

PEDESTRIANS

Pedestrian travel is the final mode of transportation to be considered in this chapter of the General Plan. Provision for safe, convenient movement of school children and the special problems of the handicapped are of special importance. Both sidewalks and separate paths are currently provided for pedestrian movement. A system of pedestrian movement should continue to be considered in subdivision design, planned developments, and specific plans. As with bicycles, separate public easements or rights-of-way provide unique opportunities for pedestrian circulation. A survey of any vacant lot in the vicinity of major destinations such as schools, parks or shopping facilities will show the mark of heavy pedestrian use.

Designing residential areas into neighborhood units with discontinuous collector and local street patterns discourages through traffic as previously discussed in this chapter. It provides the necessary separation of automobiles from residential areas and eliminates an excess of through traffic. These indirect street systems, however, are often inconvenient to the pedestrian. The planning of residential areas needs to recognize pedestrian movements, whether to schools, parks, shopping, or public transit routes. A system of pedestrian ways which recognizes foot traffic to community facilities also serves a secondary use for bicycle access to local streets and other portions of the bicycle path systems.

PEDESTRIAN POLICIES

To recognize that pedestrianways are an integral but separate part of the City's transportation system that merit consideration in existing and future land development, the City establishes the following policies:

1. Continue to promote and utilize design and location criteria for pedestrianways which enhance their use and safety throughout the city. This should include proper location of streetlights, street signs, fire hydrants, and other obstacles which often are placed in the middle of sidewalks and other pedestrianways, and criteria for corner curb cuts to accommodate wheelchairs, baby strollers, etc.
2. Actively support appropriate local and state legislation which provides for an increased level of safety and convenience for pedestrianway users.
3. In the central business area and other major commercial areas which attract a great deal of pedestrian traffic, the City should make every effort to enhance the pedestrian environment through the use of plazas, malls, arcades, walk-throughs and the establishment of shade trees and rest areas with seating facilities.

chapter seven



PUBLIC FACILITIES

Introduction
Public Facilities Policies

CHAPTER 7 PUBLIC FACILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The policies and recommendations contained in this section of the General Plan address the provision of public services and facilities necessary to meet the demands of Merced's residents. The General Plan postulates what facilities may be needed or desired in the future. This includes looking at the facilities themselves, as well as alternative means of providing services and capital improvements (e.g., public facilities fees, special assessment districts, etc.). The successful implementation of the General Plan will depend a great deal on limiting the provision of public services to those which are compatible with the other objectives of the General Plan. This review of public facilities within the General Plan process will act in the dual function of assisting as a decision-making aid and as a check on the internal consistency of the General Plan.

This chapter does not prioritize or offer a method of prioritizing projects. Where more detailed information is needed for specific projects or types of services, the policies contained in this chapter should be used as guidelines for requiring the preparation of various master plans or studies to clearly define the need, priority or method of providing services and facilities. In addition, use of the City's existing Capital Improvements Program will establish the means of correlating public projects with the needs of the community and available funding sources.

The passage of Proposition 13 can be used as a bench mark for starting a new period of heightened fiscal awareness for cities and counties throughout the state. Whether or not more limitations on fiscal spending are adopted in future years or the inflationary trends in the economy continue, the next planning period will face the task of maintaining levels of service while the cost of these services and facilities will continue to rise in direct proportion to increasing costs of labor, energy, and materials. Coupled with restrictions on sources of revenue, cities are looking much closer at the potential fiscal impact of all kinds of development. With respect to public facilities, the 1968 General Plan concerned itself primarily with questions of location and strategies for action. It is now more likely to be a question of whether the project can be funded and, if so, what other project or projects will be pre-empted.

In addition to this caution, there is also the question of whether new development will generate enough revenue to support its required services. The existing infrastructure (facilities to support the existing population) may be sufficient to support current levels of service for the present population. Diminished revenue sources must be allocated to fund operations, maintenance, and replacement of current facilities (or projects already in various stages of progress). The lack of local control to generate revenue has pointed out the tenuous position of being overly dependent on outside revenue sources, which now have increased importance but cannot be heavily relied upon, such as: revenue

sharing, block grant programs, or changes in local sales tax distribution. One criteria for the timing of project approval will be sufficient to meet the costs of the services required by the project.

GOALS

The City should support a system of public services and facilities which will meet the following goals:

- Support and encourage the intended patterns of land use established in the General Plan through the proper timing and placement of public facilities and services.

- Minimize adverse impacts on the environment and adverse fiscal, economic, and social impacts on the community.

- Protect the health, safety, and general welfare of Merced's residents by providing a level of service consistent with the needs of individual neighborhoods and the community as a whole.

- Plan and construct all public facilities to maximize energy conservation and efficiency.

PUBLIC FACILITIES POLICIES

In order to diligently implement the above goals, the following public services and facilities policies are established:

A. RECREATION AND PARKS POLICIES

1. Emphasize the acquisition and improvement of recreation facilities which link areas such as community or neighborhood parks with linear areas such as trail systems or greenbelts.
2. Review and update a parks and recreation master plan. Such review should include but not be limited to:
 - a. updating current resources,
 - b. updating acquisition and improvement priorities,
 - c. studying waterways for establishment of trail systems, and protection and enhancement of significant natural vegetation, and
 - d. including citizens from each of the City's planning areas in the process of determining current and future recreation and park needs.
3. Continue to implement the City's Park Dedication Ordinance.
4. Continue practice of providing outdoor recreation facilities on or adjacent to public schools.

5. Develop standards for providing "mini-parks" as opposed to more conventional neighborhood or community parks in some residential sections of the City.
6. Make optimum use of public service corridors such as drainage courses and railroad easements in the city by providing trails for pedestrians and bicycles along their length.
7. The existing stand of eucalyptus trees on the east side of G Street, north of Yosemite Avenue and adjacent to Merced College, should be considered as a prime location for acquisition and development of a community park.
8. The City's street trees should be considered an extremely important community facility and the City should take the necessary steps to ensure a high level of maintenance and continued development of a city-wide street tree system.
9. Upgrade the maintenance and appearance of the City's existing public parks.

B. SCHOOL POLICIES

1. Continue to work closely with the local school districts in all facets of school site and facilities planning.
2. Work with the various districts in solving problems that affect the location, design and type of schools needed to best serve the community; and incorporate these solutions in the General Plan.
3. Explore new ways of using school facilities for "non-school activities" during non-school hours and on a year-round basis.
4. Promote the maximum use of new facilities by incorporating the school/park concept in site planning.
5. Future school sites should have as many sides fronting on streets as possible, and ensure public access with pedestrian-ways where only non-street frontage is available.
6. In order to maximize the use of existing school facilities and minimize the necessity for facility construction, the City should encourage revisions in the alignment of school district boundaries to better reflect natural constraints and probable future urban growth patterns.
7. Future school sites shall be encouraged to locate on collector streets; not on major streets.

C. CIVIC AND CULTURAL FACILITIES POLICIES

1. Continue to pursue the development of a combined civic and cultural center in the downtown area.

2. Investigate and promote the development of a multi-use transportation center, combining facilities for both private and public transit. Serious consideration should be given to the use of the existing Southern Pacific Railroad Depot at 16th and N Streets for locating this type of facility.
3. Encourage and promote a motel/convention center in scale with the community's needs, somewhere in the vicinity of the freeway and the downtown core area.
4. The airport terminal and related facilities should continue to be improved as outlined in the Airport Master Plan.
5. All public agencies in the community should cooperate to minimize public expenditure by combining public facilities in a single area, where possible, and by avoiding duplication of services.

D. MEDICAL AND HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

1. Continue to support efforts by other local agencies which are directed toward consolidating medical and health care planning efforts.
2. Where appropriate, encourage all new health care facilities and expansion of existing facilities to avoid duplication of services, while ensuring that all areas of the community are adequately served.

E. SANITARY SEWER FACILITIES

1. Continue to update and review the Merced Wastewater Master Plan. As changes or amendments to the Master Plan are considered, the City should ensure that trunk line extension or expansion of wastewater treatment facilities are consistent with the land use patterns and policies established in the General Plan. The Master Plan should be expanded to analyze the entire city.
2. All wastewater planning activities should be closely coordinated with the County to minimize the impacts from septic tank systems or development of special districts within the planning area.
3. Continue to support wastewater management techniques such as land application for agricultural uses, production of methane gas as an energy source, and other techniques that prove to be practical.
4. Sewer facilities shall be designed to serve the SUDP area, reducing the size and capacity of sewer lines as they extend from the center of the city out towards the east and west boundaries of the SUDP.

5. The City shall not extend sewer service outside the city limits into the agricultural buffer zones or beyond the Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP) boundary except in emergency cases where the public health and safety are jeopardized.

F. WATER SUPPLY FACILITIES

1. Continue support of long-range groundwater studies to evaluate the quantity and quality of water supplies in the area.
2. To develop and implement a water facilities master plan for the City.
3. To investigate and promote the development of water system management techniques which will encourage water conservation and reduce excess water use.
4. Continue to support policies and programs which discourage the use of private wells and water systems, except within acceptable areas such as the County's designated Rural Residential Centers.
5. Water supply facilities shall be designed to serve the SUDP area, reducing the size and capacity of sewer lines as they extend from the center of the city out towards the east and west boundaries of the SUDP.
6. The City shall not extend water service outside the city limits into the agricultural buffer zones or beyond the Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP) boundary except in emergency cases where the public health and safety are jeopardized.

G. SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL

1. Continue inter-agency cooperation in providing safe and efficient sanitary landfill operations within the planning area.
2. Encourage and participate in studies to investigate the most effective long-range solid waste disposal solutions for the community and area as a whole.
3. Encourage and support efforts to establish alternative uses of solid waste material, such as energy production from agricultural and landscaping waste materials.
4. Continue support and expansion of public and private recycling programs in the community.

H. STORM DRAINAGE AND FLOOD CONTROL

1. Ensure that support of the Merced Streams Group Project provides community-wide flood protection consistent with the policies of the Open Space and Conservation Elements of the General Plan.

2. Continue participation in and support of the Federal Flood Insurance Program through enforcement of the local flood control ordinance.
3. Continue to implement the "Merced County Critical Area Flooding and Drainage Plan." This plan provides for improvements to existing storm drainage facilities and storm techniques for urban expansion areas. Where possible, this should include consideration of using storm water detention ponds combined with open space functions.

I. FIRE PROTECTION

1. Fire fighting equipment and companies of personnel should be sufficient in number and adequately distributed throughout the planning area to ensure:
 - a. Quick response time to all calls within the primary service area of a fire station.
 - b. Prompt availability of the additional number of companies for serious or simultaneous fires.
2. The primary service area for a fire station shall be determined by a maximum travel distance from the fire station as established by the Insurance Services Office standards. This service area should be a major determination in site location for future facilities. In addition, sites should be selected based on the distribution of land uses and population projected when the area is fully developed. Fire stations should be located so that no development in the City is outside the primary response area of at least one firehouse.
3. Ease of access should be a primary consideration in selecting a fire station site, based on the following guidelines:
 - a. Fire stations should be located on streets close to and leading into major or secondary thoroughfares.
 - b. Fire stations should be so located as to minimize delays caused by incomplete street patterns.
 - c. A fire station should be near the center of its primary service area, measured in terms of driving time to the periphery of this area.
 - d. Fire stations should be convenient to high value areas of commercial or industrial districts, but not located in them unless such a location is necessary to maintain the required service area radius.
 - e. Fire stations should not be located disturbingly close to schools or parks, but should be close to major streets leading to schools.

- f. Fire stations and their sites should be designed to fit in with their surroundings, including consideration of open spaces, off-street parking, landscaping and general appearances. These considerations are particularly important when the fire station is located in a residential district.
- g. In service areas which are residential, fire stations should be located in or near those sections which have the highest density.

J. POLICE SERVICES

- 1. Appropriate City departments should continue to work together and coordinate the development of specific design criteria to reduce potential policing problems, and improve police protection and security.
- 2. Police equipment and personnel should be sufficient in number to ensure quick response times to emergency calls.
- 3. Continue participation in and support of the City's Neighborhood Watch Program.

K. PUBLIC FACILITIES FEE

- 1. The City should continue to utilize methods (e.g., the Cost Revenue Impact System, CRIS) in evaluating public facilities, service costs, and revenues.

chapter eight



URBAN DESIGN

Introduction

Urban Design Policies

Urban Design Guidelines

CHAPTER 8 URBAN DESIGN

INTRODUCTION

The term urban design applies to a wide range of considerations. In general terms, urban design is a part of the comprehensive planning process which is primarily concerned with the functional and visual relationships between people and their physical environment. As a result, urban design is an assumed part of many other aspects of the General Plan, including transportation, open space, conservation, residential environment, public facilities, commercial development, and industrial development. Urban design is an integral part of all development, public and private, going on in the community. The role of this portion of the General Plan is to better identify these goals and policies and make them an explicit part of the General Plan.

Urban design is a grouping of concepts and guidelines which are used to describe the image or character of the city's environment. In attempting to influence the type, location, and character of both private and public development, the urban design policies provide the tools to help create a desirable relationship between the pressures for new development and the pressures for conservation. The focuses of urban design, therefore, fall into three basic categories: 1) conservation, what is to be protected; 2) development focus, where and how development is to be located; and 3) development character, the determination of appropriate physical forms and types of use. These three types of urban design activity can be further understood through the classification of the different geographic scales at which the design guidelines may apply, generally described as follows:

Regional or City Scale: In this broadest sense, urban design encompasses all the elements that make up the physical and visual qualities of the community as a whole. This includes the city's relationship to the surrounding countryside and the relationship among its parts, such as major transportation corridors, urban and rural interfaces, or distinctive landmarks.

Area or Neighborhood Scale: In this somewhat narrower perspective, urban design deals with the development patterns of specific areas which are functionally or environmentally cohesive. Urban design guidelines and concepts may be grouped by functional criteria such as industrial areas, or gateways to the city. At this scale, urban design may also address a specific geographic area, such as the central business district, or a specific residential neighborhood. The development of design systems which convey a set of design concepts to produce a certain level of legibility, orientation, compatibility, or efficiency are also necessary at this intermediate scale. This approach to urban design may include such systems as:

- street system designs
- street trees and landscaping designs

- bikeway designs
- signing systems
- transit system
- pedestrianway systems
- others

Project Scale: At the project scale, urban design is concerned with a specific project as it relates to the site, its surrounding uses, and its visual effect. At this scale, urban design is more concerned with a particular development character than the other scales of perception. The character of development and thus the urban design proposals should strive to achieve a desired level of compatibility. This compatibility generally means that there should be some specified amount of visual harmony between new development and existing surroundings. Normally, this will consist of standards for building height, bulk, density, use, location, materials, and public improvements. Compatibility and harmony are terms which should not be confused with replication but, rather, the goal is to establish a limit for the range of visual tolerances that are acceptable to the character and quality of the area where the project is located.

The application of the urban design policies and guidelines is a complex issue because any design problem involves such a variety of elements, diverse preferences, and the inter-relationship of public and private sectors. Although the end product is the goal of any urban design process, the emphasis within the context of the General Plan is on defining things to do, not designing projects. The urban design policies are a framework which describe a physical design program, related design policies, and a means of implementation.

One of the most important ideas behind the urban design guidelines is that they can be easily implemented. It is not the intent of the City to stifle a designer's or developer's imagination or require unreasonable added costs. The proposals are intended to be sensitive to public awareness and support, as well as the limits of public and private funding. The goals, policies, and guidelines are intended to help the developer and designer meet the City's standards by giving him something as clear as possible to follow. This urban design process will benefit both the public and private sector. The public decision-maker will find it easier to make consistent and equitable decisions which still carry out the larger goals of conservation, attractiveness, cost-effectiveness, and efficiency. The private sector will benefit from a preconceived knowledge of the community's desires before the design process begins, and more efficient application review and processing. The guidelines cannot spell out every detail, but it is the City's hope that project developers and designers will use the guidelines with both sensitivity and common sense to design functional and attractive projects within the community.

Beyond the end product benefits from implementing an urban design program, there are secondary economic benefits or outcomes. The increased visual amenities and aesthetic improvements to the city on the part of the private and public sector at all of the previously discussed scales of perception will result in direct economic returns to the community. The

merchant in well designed areas will attract more business and those dealing in the used property market will benefit from increased property values. The City will, in turn, benefit from increased tax revenues over the long run from both property assessments and retail sales. Most importantly, it is a very primary goal of the City of Merced and its General Plan to promote and encourage quality industrial development for the benefit of the entire community. The conscientious implementation of an urban design program will help attract quality industry given the City's interest in providing the facilities for such development, since the impression given by a well maintained and properly developed community is that of a city which cares and will be a good economic risk for major industrial investments. In these ways, urban design is an important indirect public/private financial asset.

URBAN DESIGN POLICIES

A. GENERAL FORM AND IMAGE

The following policies are established to emphasize and promote the characteristics of Merced through its physical elements which enhance the identity and image of the City, and to create a sense of functional and visual relationships among the community's land uses and open space:

1. Continue support of urban expansion boundaries and agricultural land preservation in order to discourage scattered urban development and to strengthen the visual distinction between city and agriculture.
2. Encourage policies and programs which will keep urban expansion compact.
3. Create a set of development standards for all proposed development along major gateways to the city to include consideration of land uses, signs, landscaping and public improvements.
4. Encourage joint City and County cooperation in controlling land use and development standards along all major gateways to the city.
5. Existing creeks, waterways, and significant stands of trees should be protected and incorporated into areas of new development as open space.
6. Encourage the design of buildings that are in scale with adjacent development and harmonize with the character of the areas or neighborhoods. Discourage project designs which create man-made barriers.
7. Strengthen the positive visual distinctions between areas whose function and location are identifiable but assure that various areas are visually inter-related.

8. Provide a system of recreational bikeways and trails throughout the community which enhance and preserve existing natural features (e.g., creeks) and link the major open space and recreational facilities in the community.
9. Continue the use of specific development guidelines to control land use and improvement along designated scenic corridors.

B. OVERALL APPEARANCE

To maintain and improve the overall appearance of Merced, the following policies are established:

1. Adopt and promote policies or regulations which discourage visual clutter along major streets, freeways or commercial districts created by a proliferation of signs, billboards, and eccentrically designed or garishly painted buildings.
2. Discourage scattered development patterns along major entrances to the city, such as along Highway 99, Highway 59, and Santa Fe Drive between Merced and Atwater.
3. Discourage the visual monotony along major streets created by designs which use uninterrupted walls or fences with little or no landscaping. This should include avoiding such designs where landscaping maintenance is difficult or where the responsibility for maintenance is unclear.
4. Encourage the development of methods to require acceptable levels of landscaping for new development and for landscaping maintenance in highly visible areas of the community.
5. Adopt and enforce a comprehensive street tree program to ensure planting of proper tree types and sizes for all new development, and that the necessary steps be taken to control mistletoe and other hazards to existing street trees.
6. Continue the City's programs for undergrounding utility lines.
7. Continue the City's policies which require architecturally suitable means of screening utility equipment and garbage containers.
8. Investigate and promote programs and design guidelines which will improve the appearance and functional use of the City's existing alleys.
9. Require, where possible, the landscaping of railroad corridors through the city with low maintenance yet highly effective plant materials as commonly used in the community by various CalTrans facilities.

10. Establish design principles and standards for public and private projects which can be applied by project developers and designers and used by the decision-making bodies of the City in evaluating development proposals.
11. Various public and traffic oriented street signs should be grouped whenever possible to reduce the visual clutter and unnecessary maintenance caused by the procedure of putting one pole for one sign throughout the city.
12. Update the City's sign and billboard ordinance to create a system for defining the proper size and type of signs which are appropriate for the various land uses in the city, and further establish the City's position with respect to the important role signs play in the overall appearance and image of the community.

C. CIRCULATION AND TRANSPORTATION

The following policies will aid the City in creating an appropriately visible circulation system whereby design and landscaping will identify street function and importance while linking or unifying major destinations and neighborhoods:

1. Develop a hierarchal street system relating street width, design, lighting, furniture, landscaping, and transit facilities to the function and visual importance of the street.
2. Develop specific corridor plans for designated major streets to improve or maintain the appearance of the corridor through special design, landscaping, and land use controls.
3. Assure that street widening and extensions (plan lines) are sensitive to the character of the street and the quality of adjacent development or proposed land uses.
4. Develop design guidelines which reduce conflicts between vehicles and pedestrian/bicycle circulation, especially in pedestrian oriented residential and business districts.

D. COMMERCIAL

To maintain and improve the visual quality of commercial areas, the City establishes the following design policies:

1. Strict attention should be given to the transition area between residential uses and commercial uses by requiring special landscape treatments and land use controls to lessen the impact between different land uses.
2. Related and compatible businesses should be grouped together in ways which are sensitive to surrounding land uses and accessibility.

3. Incompatible or non-commercial land uses should be eliminated or converted to commercial uses whenever appropriate in established commercial districts.
4. Major shopping facilities should provide properly designed parking facilities which are well landscaped to present a pleasing visual image from major streets and freeways.
5. Merchant groups are encouraged to initiate improvement programs that make commercial centers more attractive and more efficient. Such programs could include landscaping, architectural and sign controls, and improvement of parking and loading facilities.
6. Continue to support the long-term beautification and preservation of the downtown commercial areas as a high priority in line with the goal of keeping the downtown as a major retail and business center for the community.
7. Consider adopting a historic preservation or design review overlay zone in the commercial and commercial office zones located in the central business district and the courthouse square area to maintain the character of these areas, lessen the impacts on adjacent residential areas, and strengthen the economic and visual bond between the civic, professional, and commercial uses in Central Merced.
8. To avoid the typical clutter found along major thoroughfares in many cities, the City should control "strip commercial" sites by directing them to shopping centers and/or by establishing corridor plans which minimize their impacts.

E. INDUSTRIAL

In order to make the city's industrial areas attractive and efficient for the overall benefit of the community and to help attract quality industries to the city, the following urban design policies for industrial uses are established:

1. Continue the site plan review process for all industrial areas of the city.
2. Every effort should be made to require all new major industries to locate in established industrial areas. This should include continued efforts to establish clear lines of communication and cooperation with the County in requiring annexation of all new major industrial proposals prior to development.
3. Adopt a set of urban design guidelines to establish acceptable methods of improving the appearance of industrial sites and mitigation of conflicts between industrial and non-industrial land uses.
4. Investigate various means of encouraging existing industries in the community to improve their appearance through the addition of landscaping and screening, improvement of off-

street parking facilities, and removal of weeds and debris from the site.

5. Encourage the use of energy saving features on the design of industrial facilities.
6. Industrial nuisances such as smoke, dust, odors, noise, and glare should be adequately controlled.
7. New residential and commercial uses should be vigorously excluded from existing and planned industrial areas, except where they specifically serve the need of an industrial area.
8. The boundaries of an industrial area should be clearly defined and improved with a standard design treatment to present a clear image of the industrial area. In addition, design guidelines should be established to adequately provide buffer areas to separate industrial and residential areas. These buffer areas could be formed by some combination of off-street parking, parks or parkways, heavy commercial uses, landscaping, and screening.
9. The architectural potential of industrial structures should be fully exploited as a positive addition to the form and beauty of the city. The interest and diversity of design found in industrial architecture can be an asset to the community and need not always be screened from view. The City's efforts to present a quality industrial image will also help in efforts to attract other quality industries in the future.

F. RESIDENTIAL

The following urban design policies are established to help make all residential areas in the city as attractive, efficient, and well maintained as possible:

1. Major efforts should be made to preserve and improve the livability and identity of existing stable neighborhoods. The planting and maintenance of the proper varieties of street trees should be considered an important aspect of this policy.
2. Neighborhood deterioration should continue to be corrected and prevented through the City's participation in all possible programs supporting code enforcement and rehabilitation, as well as providing an economically feasible means for upgrading public improvements such as parks, streets, streetlights, and other neighborhood facilities.
3. Encourage comprehensive neighborhood beautification programs through landscaping, tree planting, home improvement, and general maintenance to increase neighborhood pride and improve neighborhood appearance.

4. Encourage the rehabilitation and preservation of older residential structures in Central Merced and along scenic corridors to preserve a sense of the city's history and image, and to provide for a diversity of districts and architectural styles.
5. Overhead utilities should continue to be undergrounded in all new residential developments. In the older parts of the city, programs should be encouraged which will lead toward the eventual undergrounding of all overhead utilities when feasible.
6. Residential neighborhoods should be protected from activities which produce excessive noise, dirt, odors, or generate excessive traffic.
7. All residential areas and neighborhoods in the City should be adequately served by facilities and services such as schools, parks and recreation areas, shopping centers and public transit.
8. Design guidelines should be developed to minimize the conflicts between higher density developments and low density neighborhoods as in the case where multi-family uses provide a buffer between single family and non-residential areas.
9. Large scale high density development should be channeled into locations offering accessibility and amenities. They should be located in clusters or corridors related to transportation routes, open spaces, employment centers, or commercial facilities.
10. Encourage a variety of choice in residential densities and housing types in each major section of the City (e.g., north, central, south, etc.).
11. Continue to require strict design criteria and adequate landscaping in granting the approval to develop mobile home parks in the City.
12. With regard for the overall form and image of the City, high-rise multi-family projects should only be allowed in and around the City's downtown core area.
13. In order to utilize vacant in-fill parcels, design guidelines for the development of livable multi-family projects adjacent to railroad corridors and other noisy major transportation corridors.
14. Continue to use the Planned Development Zone to encourage a diversity of residential projects which vary lot size, yard requirements, types of ownership, design, density, amenities, and mixed uses.

15. Preserve and enhance the appearance of neighborhoods, the City should develop a program to provide for the removal of abandoned structures or other forms of blight.

G. HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Reminders of the past in the form of historically and architecturally significant structures should be retained whenever possible to maintain and enhance the image and identity of Merced as a stable rural community. This goal should be encouraged through the following design policies:

1. Support both private and public efforts to preserve and rehabilitate historic structures in the city. This should include the need to preserve or protect a site or area of historically or architectural significance from intrusion of surrounding land uses which are uncomplementary or incompatible with the older structure.
2. Initiate a program or support other programs which designate historic landmarks and architecturally significant structures in the community.
3. Support the Merced Historical Society and its programs and efforts to preserve and educate the public about Merced's past heritage.
4. Continue to support the preservation of the downtown's historically and architecturally significant buildings through their preservation and enhancement. This should include continued support of the redevelopment design guidelines, programs aimed at renovating older structures and removing inappropriate signs or facades, and controlling the design of new development to be consistent with the design, character, and building bulk of the existing downtown.
5. Encourage and support efforts by the County to preserve the historically and architecturally significant structures in the Courthouse Square area.

URBAN DESIGN GUIDELINES

The visual form of Merced is comprised of the separate components. This blending of visual elements gives the city as a whole or in distinct neighborhoods an identity or image. This gives people a strong sense of community. The development of an urban design element is based on the assumption that a sense of place or identity can be designed and that a desired physical form can be created or at least enhanced through the use of various design methods.

The urban design guidelines graphically present and complement the preceding urban design policies. These guidelines demonstrate the design possibilities which can create diversity in the visual, physical, social, and functional components of Merced's physical environment. These guidelines can be used to stimulate, guide, and influence

development in the City. The guidelines may be general in their application to different circumstances, or quite specific in defining a design idea for a particular location. The guidelines allow flexibility for individual creativity, yet establish a systematic approach whereby the City can avoid a disorganized or scattered image often characteristic of most communities. With the prospect of a growing population and diversity of development occurring over the next decades, many of the existing residents and those attracted to the community will continue to prefer thinking of Merced as a small town with natural features and other rural qualities. The urban design guidelines will help to maintain and strengthen this image and heritage.

chapter nine



GENERAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

General Plan Amendments
and Annual Review

General Plan Consistency
Action Programs

CHAPTER 9

THE PLANNING PROCESS AND GENERAL PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

INTRODUCTION

As stated in Chapter 1, a primary assumption of the General Plan is that the quality of life in Merced can be improved by the participation of citizens and public officials in a concerted planning effort. Using the General Plan as an active reference tool and an educational document, the City must continue the effort to follow the plan. This effort is being accomplished through the normal activities of the City as future land use decisions and development proposals are evaluated and acted upon consistently with the goals and policies in this Plan. In addition, several areas of concern are identified which warrant specific follow-up actions in order to effectively implement the policies in this Plan.

This implementation of the General Plan can be viewed as a positive commitment by the City to follow through with the goals and policies contained in the General Plan. The activities necessary to properly carry out the administration of the General Plan are clearly spelled out in the State's planning laws which state that after adoption of a general plan, the following activities are to be initiated to implement the general plan:

- a. Investigate and make recommendations to the legislative body upon reasonable and practical means for putting into effect the pattern and guide for the orderly physical growth and development and the preservation and conservation of open space land of the county or city and as a basis for the efficient expenditure of its funds relating to the subjects of the general plan; the measures recommended may include plans, regulations, financial reports, and capital budgets.
- b. Render an annual report to the legislative body on the status of the plan and progress in its application.
- c. Endeavor to promote public interest in and understanding of the general plan, and regulations relating to it.
- d. Consult and advise with public officials and agencies, public utility companies; civic, educational, professional and other organizations; and citizens regarding implementation of the general plan.

(Government Code Section 65400)

To effectively carry out the General Plan, the City has numerous tools available to actively pursue the tasks outlined above. The General Plan Guidelines prepared by the State Office of Planning and Research suggest the following tools currently available to cities for implementing a general plan:

Corporate Powers

- ° Construction of streets, roads, and water and sewage treatment facilities
- ° Park acquisition and development
- ° Site acquisition for low- and moderate-income housing
- ° Purchase of development rights and scenic easements
- ° Utility extension policies

Others

- ° Intergovernmental coordination
- ° Public information
- ° Data management
- ° Monitoring

Police Powers

- ° Specific plans
- ° Zoning:
 - Open space zoning
 - Environmental hazard zoning
 - Inclusionary zoning
 - Planned unit development
- ° Subdivision regulation
- ° Park dedication requirements
- ° School dedication requirements
- ° Housing and building regulation
- ° Code enforcement
- ° Environmental review procedures
- ° Design review

The purpose of this chapter on implementing the General Plan is to select and organize these available tools in a manner which is consistent with the goals and policies of Merced's General Plan. The primary consideration in choosing a plan for implementation is to clearly understand that the General Plan is not a static document, it should not be viewed as a description of just an end product. The plan must be continually reviewed to reflect changing conditions and needs in the community. For example, some policies reflect long-range goals which may take years to achieve yet still remain important; others may reflect short-term policies subject to rapidly changing conditions. The key in either case is for the City to develop an on-going system for review of existing conditions in the community and for an evaluation of the current adequacy of the General Plan. This review process and an active program to continually update the General Plan is broken down into the following basic areas:

- a. Annual review of General Plan adequacy and processing of General Plan amendments.
- b. Consistency in implementing the General Plan.
- c. Action programs to implement the General Plan.

Through these different approaches, the City has developed a comprehensive planning process which will be reflective of the community's changing character and priorities over the coming years. At the same time, the planning process will build in an ability to keep the General Plan up-to-date so that it can remain a reliable reference tool for many years to come.

A. GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENTS AND ANNUAL REVIEW

In the past, general plans and master plans in the City have been accepted as end-state products, adopted to be adhered to as long as they reflect current conditions. As circumstances changed, the plans became less valuable as planning aids and eventually became obsolete. In order to avoid this chain of events, the City has adopted a method of evaluating changing conditions and revisions to the Plan in a systematic manner. By grouping amendments to the plan and limiting the number of times each year that the Plan may be amended, the City is better equipped to evaluate the combined effect of these changes on the Plan as a whole, the current adequacy of the Plan, and changing priorities in implementing the goals and policies of the Plan. This systematic approach to updating the General Plan on a regular schedule greatly increases the possibility of maintaining the General Plan so that it continues to be a reliable planning tool in the City's decision-making process.

To develop this planning process and organization of General Plan Amendments, the following steps have been adopted:

1. GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENTS: Amendments to the General Plan should be limited to three (3) times each year. The specific number of changes for each amendment period is not restricted. The grouping of changes, both City and privately initiated, better accommodates evaluation of the proposed revisions and provide an opportunity to maintain internal consistency after changes are adopted.
2. ANNUAL REVIEW: The Planning Commission and City Council have selected May of each year for making an indepth analysis of the adequacy of the General Plan. This is accompanied by staff presentation of updated information found in the Statistical Appendices of the General Plan. Updating the Plan's Technical Appendices is a specific responsibility carried out each year on a regular basis.
3. REVIEW OF MASTER PLANS: At the same time the General Plan is being reviewed, the City's other pertinent master plans are also reviewed for adequacy and possible revision. This includes such items as the North Merced Sewer Master Plan, or the Parks Master Plan. Existing planning mechanisms within the City also are incorporated into this review process, such as the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) and the County's Specific Urban Development Plan (SUDP).
4. SETTING OF PRIORITIES AND ACTION PROGRAMS: The final step in this annual review process is the setting of priorities. If new areas of concern are identified, staff can be directed at this time to proceed with new programs. Old programs can be reevaluated and rejuvenated, or dropped as appropriate.

B. CONSISTENCY IN IMPLEMENTING THE GENERAL PLAN

Like many cities in California, the General Plan in Merced has been regarded primarily as an advisory document in the past. The General Plan was not always referenced or used as a binding set of guidelines or requirements in day-to-day land use decisions. In most cases, land use decisions or zoning amendments have been made based on the individual merits of a project, rather than a careful analysis of whether the proposal was consistent with the overall intent or policies in the General Plan. Over a long period of time, these individual decisions, which have no direct relation to the Plan, have made past General Plans less than useful documents.

As expressed in the State General Plan Guidelines, "the general plan is seen as a constitution for local development which allocates scarce community resources among competing demands based on an understanding of the entire community's best interests. The day-to-day decisions of local government, it is argued, should not be made on an ad hoc basis, but should follow logically from and be consistent with this constitution."

At present, the legal mandates for achieving general plan consistency in Merced are limited to requiring that all subdivisions and redevelopment plans must be consistent with the General Plan. Although zoning consistency is currently not required because charter cities are exempted under State law, it is reasonable for the City to assume this responsibility for achieving consistency between zoning and the General Plan. This will act as a clear statement of the City's commitment to the goals and policies expressed in the General Plan.

The effort necessary to achieve consistency between the General Plan and local land use decisions falls into two stages. First, the City has made a concerted effort to bring the local Zoning Ordinance (both text and map) into consistency with the General Plan. Secondly, the City has adopted a local mandate to require on-going consistency between the Zoning Ordinance and the General Plan. This requirement establishes the City's intent to maintain the General Plan in the coming years. In addition, this consistency requirement closely fits into the annual review process and limitation of General Plan amendments discussed in the preceding section.

C. ACTION PROGRAMS

The last important step to ensure implementation of the General Plan involves the follow-up of goals and policies of the Plan through the initiation of action programs. By its nature, the General Plan addresses an extended time frame and the general patterns of land use. Within this framework, it is necessary to adopt some new ordinances and procedures, as well as to prepare more detailed plans for implementing specific parts of the General Plan.

These more detailed plans may pertain to different levels of application, depending on the issue involved. Some plans are required on an area-wide basis, such as the North Merced Sewer Master Plan, a parks and recreation master plan, or the Specific Urban Development Plan. Other plans will be concerned with more definite locations, such as the proposed gateway and corridor specific plans, or the Redevelopment Plan. These detailed action programs will provide the opportunity for neighborhood residents, local business people, and land owners to participate in preparing the plans which will directly affect them while, at the same time, ensuring that individual developments are consistent with the overall scheme for the area as prescribed in the General Plan.

The following outline of action programs is proposed at this time. The City staff should request guidance in establishing a list of priorities to begin preparation of these action programs in the coming years. New action programs should be added to this section of the General Plan as new issues or problem areas are identified during the General Plan review process in the future.

1. Specific Plans

State law authorizes cities and counties to adopt specific plans for implementing their general plans in designated areas. Government Code Section 65451 defines a specific plan to include "all detailed regulations, conditions, programs and proposed legislation which shall be necessary or convenient for the systematic implementation" of the general plan. This provision may include measures to implement both mandatory and optional elements of the general plan and requires that a specific plan include "regulations, conditions, programs and proposed legislation" regarding:

- a. The location of and standards for land uses and facilities;
- b. The location of and standards for streets, roads, and other transportation facilities;
- c. Standards for population density and building intensity and provisions for supporting services;
- d. Standards for conservation, development, and use of natural resources;
- e. Provisions for implementing the Open Space Element; and,
- f. Other appropriate measures.

This type of planning tool has been successfully used in Merced to bridge the gap between the General Plan and the Zoning Ordinance in the Fahrens Park Specific Plan. Specific plans are considered a good mechanism to use in the future for the areas presently labeled as Urban Expansion Area "Proposed and Specific Plan Areas" on the General Plan Land Use Map.

When it has been determined that the timing is right for these areas to develop, specific plans should be prepared to ensure consistency with the General Plan and clear the path for streamlining the permit approval process during development of the specific plan area.

2. Target Areas

The General Plan has also identified particular locations which require some form of more detailed planning. In some cases, further investigation may uncover the need to prepare a specific plan or a redevelopment plan to successfully correct existing conditions or achieve a desired end-state for a particular location. At this time, these tentatively identified locations are to be called "target areas." Figure 9-A and the adjoining key locate and briefly identify a list of "target areas." Again, this list should be studied during the General Plan annual review process to set priorities and make any additions or deletions to the list.

3. Master Plans

Another tool which should be used to implement the General Plan is the preparation and adoption of master plans. The master plan should be considered like a specific plan in its scope and depth in detailing methods to correct a situation or reach an end-state. The master plan differs from specific plans in that it is more of an overlay plan with application on an area-wide or city-wide basis, rather than applying to the development of a specific locality.

A tentative list of master plans needed to implement the General Plan includes:

- a. Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- b. Street Trees Master Plan
- c. Storm Drainage Master Plan
- d. Fire Station Master Plan
- e. Water Facilities Master Plan
- f. Sanitary Sewer Master Plan
- g. Energy Conservation Master Plan
- h. Others

4. Ordinance and Code Revisions

In several parts of the General Plan, it is proposed that additions or revisions be made to the City's existing codes and ordinances in order to carry out the goals and policies of

the Plan. The changes are a necessary step in the overall implementation of the General Plan. For example, Chapter 5 on the economic environment in the community proposes the creation of a new zoning district to conform with the Heavy Commercial land use designation on the Land Use Map. To implement the General Plan, the City should amend the Zoning Ordinance to include this new zoning district. Other code revisions suggested in the Plan include a directive to review existing codes and ordinances to identify and correct regulations which may be deterrents to the goals and policies of the General Plan. This is particularly important with regard to the policies related to promoting in-fill development, enhancing existing commercial areas, and preserving historically and architecturally significant structures.

5. Design Guidelines

Chapter 5 on Economic Environment and Chapter 8 on Urban Design call for the development and adoption of design guidelines for the various land uses in the City. Due to the time necessary to prepare these guidelines, they are not included in the General Plan at the time of its original adoption. These design guidelines are an important element in the realization of the goals and policies of the General Plan and, as such, should be given a high priority in the follow-up activities needed to fully implement the General Plan.

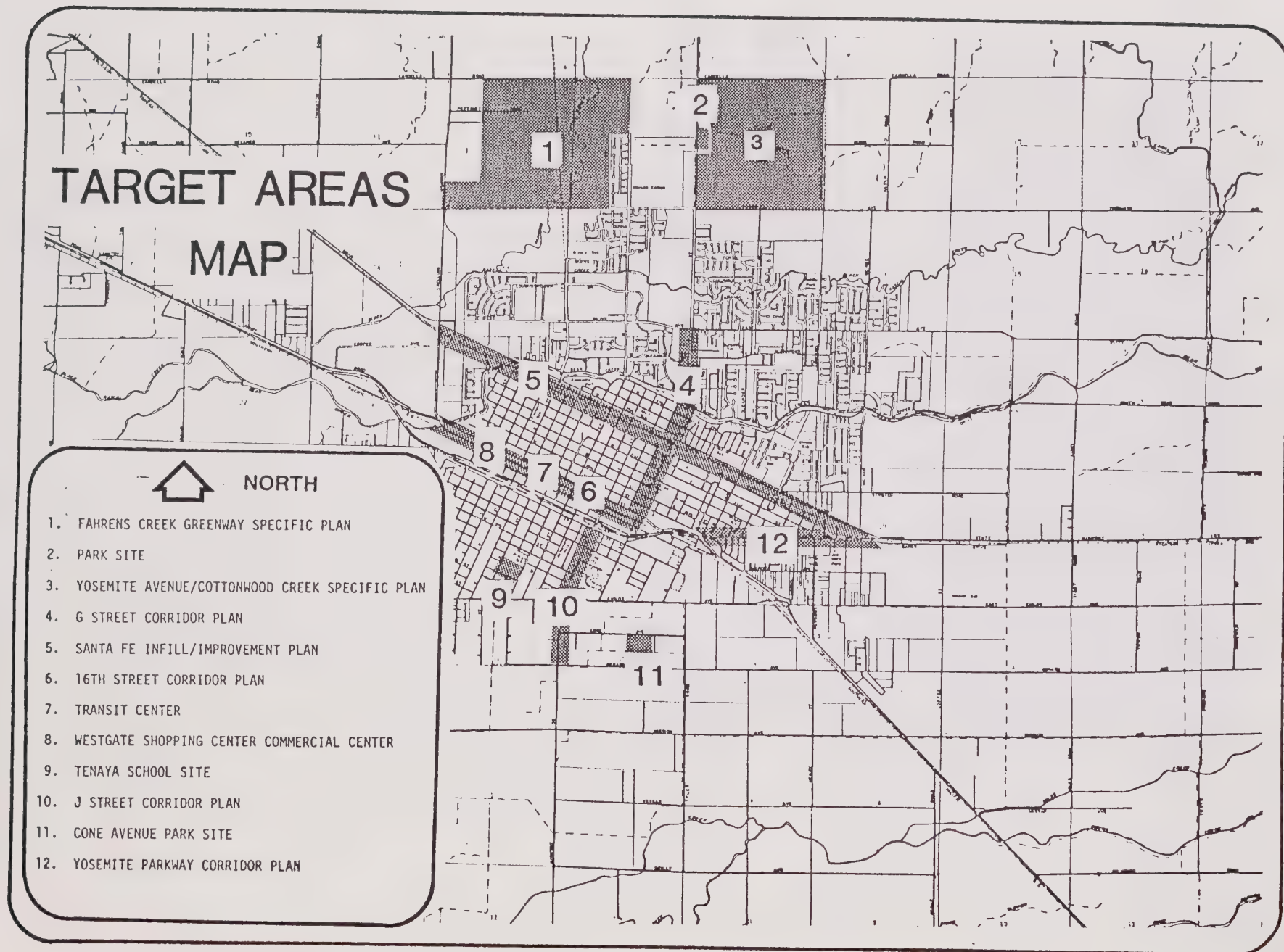


Figure 9-A

Figure 9-B

HOUSING IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM 1986-1992

<u>HOUSING PROGRAM</u>	<u>PERSON RESPONSIBLE</u>	<u>TARGET DATE</u>	<u>GROUP BENEFITTED</u>	<u>OBJECTIVE</u>
I. Provide Adequate Sites:				
A. Expedite wastewater collection project	Public Works Director	1987	All income levels	500 units per year after 1987
B. Promote contiguous development				
1. Design and keep current a developable land file	Planning Director	1986	All income levels	60 units per year
2. Promote in-filling by designating increased densities on General Plan map	Planning Director	On-going	Low and moderate income	Included in 1. above
3. Designate development areas on zoning map	Planning Director	On-going	Low and moderate income	Included in 1. above
C. Investigate funding sources for provision of public improvements	Planning Director/ Public Works Director	1987	All income levels	Included in 1(A). above
II. Provide Sites for Various Types of Housing:				
A. Establish sites for mobile home parks	Planning Director	On-going	Low and moderate income	Average 10 units per year
B. Flexible land use controls				
1. Density bonuses on designated sites	Planning Director	On-going	Low and moderate income	25 units per year
2. Random mixed lots allows higher densities by mixing smaller and larger lot sizes in new subdivisions	Planning Director	On-going	Low and moderate income	5 units per year
3. Granny flats and duplexes on corner lots	Planning Director	On-going	Low and moderate income	5 units per year
4. Multiple units on large lots	Planning Director	On-going	Low and moderate income	5 units per year
C. Promote various housing types	Planning Director	On-going		
III. Housing to Meet Needs of Low and Moderate Income:				
A. Design developer information packet describing programs (CHFA, mortgage revenue bonds, and other State and Federal grants available)	Planning Director	1986	Low and moderate income	35 units per year
B. Monitor rental stock through annual survey	Planning Director	1986	Low and moderate income	
C. Continue mortgage revenue bond program	City Manager/ City Attorney	On-going	Low and moderate income	50 units per year
D. Monitor Housing Element	Planning Director	Annually		
E. Cooperate with County Housing Authority in promoting Section 8 new construction and Section 8 existing	Planning Director	On-going	Low and moderate income	6 units per year
F. Use 20% Set-Aside Redevelopment funds for low income housing project	Redevelopment Director	1990	Low and moderate income	40 units per year after 1990
IV. Remove Governmental Constraints:				
A. Flexible land use controls (see II B. 1-4 above)	Planning Director	On-going		
B. Expedite permit procedures	Planning Director/ Building Division/ Engineering Department	On-going		
C. Annual fees survey	Planning Director	On-going		

Figure 9-B (CONTINUED)

V. Conserve and Improve the Condition of Housing Stock:

A.	Vigorous code enforcement	Building Division	On-going		
B.	Establish program/funding for city-wide rehabilitation program	Planning Director	1987	Low and moderate income	
C.	Promote awareness of rehabilitation and maintenance techniques	Building Division/ Housing Improvement Program Division	1986	All income levels	
D.	Investigate opportunities for rehabilitation funding	Housing Improvement Program Division	Study/On-going	Low and moderate income	75 units per year
E.	Promote historic preservation	Planning Director/ Redevelopment Director	On-going		
F.	Explore/study various funding sources for energy conservation	Planning Director	1987		
G.	Promote public awareness of the City's established energy policies	Planning Director	1986		
H.	Investigate potential benefits of various energy-saving techniques such as smaller streets, solar access rights	Planning Director	1986		

VI. Promote Equal Housing Opportunity:

A.	Promote public awareness of City's relationship with Merced County Community Housing Resources Board to handle housing complaints	Planning Director	On-going	All income levels	
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